

West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee** held on **Monday 26 June 2017** at **5.00 pm** at the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present: **Councillors**

St Edmundsbury Borough Council

Forest Heath District Council

John Burns
Jim Thorndyke

Rona Burt
Chris Barker
David Bowman

By Invitation:

Brian Harvey

32. **Election of Chairman for 2017/2018**

This being the first meeting of the West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee since both Authority's Annual Meetings in May 2017, the Monitoring Officer opened the meeting and asked for nominations for the Chairman of the Committee for 2017/2018.

Members were advised that whilst nothing was stipulated in the Terms of Reference, it had been practice since the Joint Committee was formed for the chairmanship to be annually rotated between the two authorities. The chairmanship for 2016/2017 had been held by Forest Heath District Council.

Some Members of the Joint Committee questioned the value of changing the chairmanship in light of the Joint Committee only having elected their Chairman and Vice-Chairman for 2016/2017 in April, just two months prior.

Accordingly, recognising the exceptional nature of the circumstances, Councillor Rona Burt proposed that Councillor David Bowman (FHDC) be elected as Chairman for 2017/2018, therefore enabling him to continue in the role, and this was duly seconded by Councillor Chris Barker.

There being no other nominations, the motion was put to the vote and it was

RESOLVED:

That Councillor David Bowman be elected Chairman for 2017/2018.

Councillor Bowman then took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

33. **Election of Vice-Chairman for 2017/2018**

The Chairman nominated Councillor John Burns (SEBC) as Vice-Chairman for 2017/2018 and this was seconded by Councillor Chris Barker.

There being no other nominations, the motion was put to the vote and it was

RESOLVED:

That Councillor John Burns be elected Vice-Chairman for 2017/2018.

34. **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

Councillor Bob Cockle (SEBC) was unable to attend the meeting.

35. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes present at the meeting.

36. **Public Participation**

There were no questions/statements from members of the public.

37. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2017 were unanimously accepted by the Committee as an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

38. **Review of Standards Activity (Report No: JST/JT/17/002)**

The Monitoring Officer presented this item which updated Members on current Standards activity for West Suffolk.

The report was produced following a request made at the last meeting of the Joint Committee on 13 April 2017.

Attention was drawn to the two exempt Appendices A and C, which were attached to the agenda. In order to facilitate discussion on these documents the Joint Committee resolved to move into Part 2 of the agenda.

39. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

With the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That, under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as prescribed in Part 1 Section 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and indicated against each item.

40. **Review of Standards Activity (Report No: JST/JT/17/002) (Exempt: Paras 1 & 2)**

Considerable discussion took place within the exempt part of the meeting primarily on the concerning trend of the growing number of complaints made from within Town and Parish Councils.

Suggested ways of addressing this were proposed by Members as follows:

- Members of the Joint Standards Committee visit the Parish/Town Councils in question to provide assistance/guidance on standards;
- Facilitate, in conjunction with SALC, some form of peer-to-peer/engagement exercise for Parish/Town Council Clerks;
- Provide a training event on the standards regime to District and Borough Councillors alongside Parish Councillors; and
- Use the West Suffolk Parish Forums as a platform for communication to the Parish/Town Councils.

Discussion also took place with regard to elected Members' Declaration of Interest forms. Concern was raised that some Parish and Town Councillors' forms appeared to be missing from the website (presumably not having been received by the Borough or District Council).

The need to ensure that the regular review of the forms by Members was recorded/evidenced in some way was also discussed and the Monitoring Officer agreed to look into an appropriate way of facilitating this electronically. She would also arrange for a reminder to be sent to all District/Borough and Parish/Town Councillors in this respect.

Lastly, attention was drawn to Appendix C which outlined an ongoing case in respect of a Town Council and the Joint Committee's views were sought on the options for the next appropriate step. Members supported sending a letter to the Councillor to advise them that if they did not offer an apology to the complainant then the matter would be referred back to the Joint Committee, which could entail further sanctions being employed, including the potential for a press notice.

With the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That:-

1. The West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee noted the contents of the review activity, as presented in Report No: JST/JT/17/002, and the Monitoring Officer be authorised to take the necessary appropriate action, as suggested by the Joint Committee, in respect of Parish/Town Council complaints;
2. With regard to the case set out in Appendix C of the report, a letter be sent to the Councillor to advise them that if they did not offer an apology to the complainant then the matter would be referred back to

the Joint Committee, with the potential for a notice in the local press being issued;

3. Officers issue a reminder to all West Suffolk elected Members (District/Borough/Town/Parish) to remind them to ensure that their Declarations of Interest were completed and accurate; and
4. Officers to explore ways in which Declarations of Interest could be reviewed and evidenced electronically.

The meeting concluded at 6.21 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
