

West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee** held on **Monday 16 July 2018 at 3.00 pm** at the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present: **Councillors**

Forest Heath District Council

Chris Barker
David Bowman
Rona Burt

St Edmundsbury Borough Council

John Burns
Jim Thorndyke
Julia Wakelam

55. Election of Chairman for 2018/2019

This being the first meeting of the West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee since the Authority's Annual Meeting in May 2018, the Monitoring Officer opened the meeting and asked for nominations for the Chairman of the Committee for 2018/2019.

Councillor Rona Burt nominated Councillor John Burns as Chairman and this was seconded by Councillor David Bowman.

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

RESOLVED:

That Councillor John Burns be elected Chairman for 2018/2019.

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

56. Election of Vice-Chairman for 2018/2019

Councillor Rona Burt nominated Councillor David Bowman as Vice Chairman and this was seconded by Councillor Chris Barker.

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

RESOLVED:

That Councillor David Bowman be elected Vice Chairman for 2018/2019.

57. **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

58. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes present at the meeting.

59. **Public Participation**

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

60. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2018 were unanimously accepted as an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

(Councillor Julia Wakelam joined the meeting at 3.05pm on conclusion of this item.)

61. **Discussion with Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) (verbal)**

The Chairman welcomed Sally Longmate, CEO of Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC), to the meeting.

Sally informed the Joint Committee that she was still relatively new to the post; having joined SALC a little over four months ago. In that time she had commenced the undertaking of a wholesale review of the organisation with the aim of applying her business background to the operation and developing a strategic, innovative vision for the way forward.

Members were advised that SALC was fortunate to have a high level of membership across the county and the Association wanted to ensure that it was offering the best possible service it could to its members.

SALC was conscious that Parish Clerks were often a solitary role in need of support and advice and that the internet was a key resource for them. Accordingly, a number of projects were planned which would significantly increase the online offer that SALC provided such as the 'model council' tool.

Sally also spoke upon the importance of SALC's engagement with all tiers of local government, Monitoring Officers and the community/voluntary sector. She advised the Joint Committee that for the first time SALC had recently undertaken work regionally alongside the other Eastern region counties (Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Herts and Beds) which enabled them to have a greater 'voice' nationally.

Members then posed a number of questions to Sally which she responded to, these concerned; SALC's relationship with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), how SALC was structured and the timeline for identified projects/services.

The Joint Committee also asked if Sally was aware of what percentage of Suffolk Parish Clerks had undertaken the professional CiLCA qualification. Sally agreed to source this information and would provide a response directly to the West Suffolk Councils.

Members thanked Sally for her attendance and valued input and welcomed future engagement. Sally then left the meeting.

62. **Update on Standards Activity (Report No: JST/JT/18/003)**

This report updated Members on the work of the Monitoring Officer since the last update was provided to the Joint Committee in December 2017.

Attention was drawn to Paragraph 1.2 of Report No JST/JT/18/003 which showed that the total number of complaints for 2017/2018 was exactly the same as the total for 2016/2017 (21).

Members were advised that there were over 700 Parish/Town/District/Borough Councillors within West Suffolk meaning the total number of complaints only accounted for around 3% and only 1% of these were upheld. This demonstrated that standards were overall very high.

The Joint Committee was also asked to consider the section of the report which related to Councillors who were landlords. The Monitoring Officer explained that there had been interest nationally on the topic of Councillors as landlords and whether they should be able to take part in voting and discussion on policies related to private sector housing.

To offer clarity to those West Suffolk Councillors who were also landlords it was suggested that the Joint Committee consider a dispensation based on the principals set out in Paragraph 4.6 of the report.

Considerable discussion took place on this matter with the Joint Committee wishing to strengthen the wording proposed in the report.

As such, it was proposed and duly seconded and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That, in light of the items due for consideration at the Shadow Council meeting on 17 July 2018, an email be sent to all West Suffolk Councillors from the Monitoring Officer on conclusion of the Joint Standards Committee meeting to advise that:

Councillors must declare if they are a landlord in West Suffolk when any private sector housing matters are considered by the Council.

If any Councillor believes that their judgement would be impaired by their own personal situation, then they should not take part in a decision.

Any Councillor who has concerns as to their own personal situation and ability to take part in a discussion or vote should seek and follow the advice of the Monitoring Officer.

In particular:

- a) No Councillor should be able to discuss, participate or take part in voting at any meeting of the Council which is considering a specific decision / determination about a property they own, or a tenant of such property;
- b) No Councillors should be able to discuss, participate or take part in voting at a council meeting assessing a matter related to the private sector housing rental market where, at the time the decision is made, they financially gain or lose as a landlord as a result of the decision;
- c) No Councillor should be able to discuss, participate or take part in voting where it specifically requires them to do something as a landlord, that the majority of landlords in the Council's area would not be required to do

Councillors may take part in a decision where:

- a) It is a general policy relating to the Council's approach towards housing and homelessness; AND
- b) It does not impact on them, or their properties; AND
- c) Any action required as a result of the decision is no different to the majority of landlords in West Suffolk

63. **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.

64. **Report No: JST/JT/18/003 Exempt Appendix 1: Standards Cases (Paragraphs 1 & 2)**

Discussion then took place within the exempt part of the meeting on Appendix 1 to Report No JST/JT/18/003 which set out the detail of the standards cases referred to the Monitoring Officer over the past year.

The Monitoring Officer advised that it continued to be the case that 2-3 Parish Councils generated the majority of complaints.

A number of Members questioned whether there would be value in bringing complaints of this nature before the Joint Committee. However, the Monitoring Officer explained that the majority of these types of complaints usually related to disputes between individuals with no demonstrable evidence that the Code of Conduct had been breached, hence, they were rarely upheld and thus would not normally be referred to the Committee in line with the agreed approach to complaints.

In relation to the one specific Parish Council which was the source of a large proportion of complaints, it was suggested that the Monitoring Officer raise this with SALC to see if they were able to assist and provide mediation.

With the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and the Monitoring Officer raise the above matter with SALC to ascertain if they were able to offer assistance with the Parish Council concerned.

Prior to closing the meeting the Chairman asked that all Members noted the next scheduled date of the Joint Committee on 10 December 2018.

The meeting concluded at 5.02pm

Signed by:

Chairman
