

West Suffolk Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Suffolk Standards Committee** held on **Monday 3 August 2020** at **5.00 pm** via Microsoft Teams

Present: **Councillors**

Chair Jim Thorndyke

Vice Chair Max Clarke

Margaret Marks

Andy Neal

In attendance:

Carol Bull (Portfolio Holder for Governance)

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Roger Dicker.

Councillors John Augustine, Robert Everitt and Jim Meikle were also unable to attend the meeting.

2. **Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor Andy Neal substituting for Councillor Roger Dicker.

Following which, the Monitoring Officer verbally outlined all Members of the Committee who were present, together with any attending Councillors and the names of the Officers supporting the meeting.

3. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to it being noted that the paragraph in Minute No 12 should be **amended** to read:

"Following discussion and advice provided by the Monitoring Officer, Councillor Max Clarke nominated himself as **Vice** Chair and this was seconded by Councillor Roger Dicker."

4. **Declarations of Interest**

Members' declarations of interest are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

5. **Public Participation**

No members of the public had registered to speak.

6. **LGA Consultation on a Model Code of Conduct (Report No: STC/WS/20/001)**

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that in January 2019, the Committee for Standards in Public Life (CSPL) concluded a review into ethical standards in Local Government.

As part of its review, the Committee made a wide-ranging set of recommendations. This included a number of proposals in respect of the existing legislative framework, as well as a recommendation that the Local Government Association (LGA) should seek to recommend a model Code of Conduct across authorities, which, if adopted, would help ensure consistency for both Councillors and the public in terms of what was expected from elected representatives.

Accordingly, in June 2020 the LGA commenced consultation on a draft Code of Conduct; the Consultation invited interested parties to answer a series of questions in respect of the draft model Code.

The Chair advised the meeting that each question as posed by the LGA would be taken in turn, with the Committee being asked to agree a response on behalf of the Council.

Once concluded, Members would then be asked to consider the separate written response the Council would also provide; a proposed draft of which was attached to the report as Appendix D.

Considerable discussion took place on this item with Members considering each of the responses in detail.

The Monitoring Officer also informed the Committee that she had attended an LGA webinar on the topic during the previous week and she summarised the discussions that took place.

It was proposed by Councillor Margaret Marks, seconded by Councillor Max Clarke and with the vote being unanimous, it was **RESOLVED** that

Decision

1. The Council's response to the LGA draft Model Code of Conduct Questionnaire, as attached at Appendix C be agreed as follows:

Question	Response
1	To a great extent
2	No
3	Personal (I will)
4 and 5	Great Extent for all except point 5, confidential information, to which a comment should be made that there needs to be an exception for

	councillors seeking professional advice or for disclosures genuinely made in the public interest
6	As a long list then guidance
7 / 7a	To a great extent, but within the additional comments include that West Suffolk Council would like to see respect feature more prominently than just being "respect for a position". The Committee recognised that the topics of respect and civility are very important, but could be problematic for the purposes of inclusion within the Code.
8	Great Extent
9 / 9a	Great Extent but in the commentary note that the guidance on harassment should be expanded to reflect that harassment is not just based on a protected characteristic
10 / 10a / 10b	No; social media should be integrated in the Code; and that in the commentary West Suffolk Council would expect to see greater mention of it
11 / 11a	Not at all. The Committee are concerned that it is a potential invasion of privacy for friends / relatives who may not want their personal affairs to be disclosed simply as they are friends with / related to a Councillor. The committee felt it is also not clear the extent to which such interests should be registered in standing declarations of interest versus being declared at meetings
12	Appendix
13 / 13a	Great Extent, but there needs to be clarity on "membership" of an organisations as whilst some organisations have formal membership procedures, others, such as Extinction Rebellion, are more nebulous; there may need to be a concept of a member "considers they are a member of" an organisations
14	Great Extent
15	Keep at £25
16a	West Suffolk Council of course always welcomes support and guidance for Councillors
17	See written statement

2. The final wording and submission of the accompanying written statement (attached at Appendix) be delegated to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee and Portfolio Holder for Governance;
3. Any further comments from Members to be emailed directly to the Monitoring Officer as soon as possible; and
4. A copy of the full submission (questionnaire and statement) be sent to all Committee Members by the Monitoring Officer for information.

The meeting concluded at 7.14 pm

Signed by:

Chair
