

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

### **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

#### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THURSDAY, 19TH SEPTEMBER, 2019**

**PRESENT:-**

**Independent Members:** Dr Axel Palmer and Deborah Russell

**Parish Representatives:** none present

**Bath and North East Somerset Councillors:** Jess David, Sally Davis, Duncan Hounsell and Michelle O'Doherty

**Officers:** Maria Lucas (Director of Legal and Democratic) and Enfys Hughes (Democratic Services Officer)

**Independent Person:** Tony Drew

#### **12 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was noted that there was a Parish Councillor vacancy. The Democratic Services Officer informed the meeting that ALCA (Avon Local Council Association) had been informed and it was on the agenda for their September 2019 meeting. She was waiting to be notified of the details of the new Parish Councillor representative.

#### **13 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Democratic Services Officer announced the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTION**

Apologies were received from Cyril Davies, Tony Crouch and Clive Fricker.

#### **15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **16 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIR**

There was no urgent business.

#### **17 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC - TO RECEIVE DEPUTATIONS, STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS (COMPLAINTS MUST GO THROUGH THE STANDARDS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE)**

There were no items from the public.

#### **18 ITEMS FROM COUNCILLORS AND CO-OPTED AND ADDED MEMBERS RELATING TO THE GENERAL BUSINESS OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were no items from councillors.

## **19 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 4TH JULY 2019**

The minutes of the meeting of 4<sup>th</sup> July 2019 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

## **20 ANNUAL REPORT ON COMMISSION FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IN ENGLAND (LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN) COMPLAINTS**

The Committee was asked to note the Annual Review and determinations made by the Ombudsman and determine what, if any, further action was required.

The Monitoring Officer stated that she had been informed that the appendix relating to compliance had been re-issued by the Ombudsman as it had been noted that though the cases were correct, the reference numbers were incorrect. A new appendix had been circulated.

The Monitoring Officer informed the meeting that there were four less complaints upheld this year, which was very good. In addition, of the five cases that were upheld, remedies had been provided by the Council in two cases. Of the others, all the remedies suggested by the Ombudsman had been followed and lessons had been learned.

Following a question from an independent member, the Monitoring Officer stated that compared to other local authorities of a similar size, it would be unusual to have more than ten cases upheld.

**RESOLVED** to note the Annual Report on the Commission for Local Administration in England.

## **21 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE 2018-2019**

The Committee was asked to comment on the Annual Report and recommend it to Council.

The Monitoring Officer informed the meeting that section 7 of the report had been re-written to include further work that had been undertaken during the year.

During discussion the following issues were noted:

- Most of the issues were low level, not breaches
- Several of the complaints arose from non-declaration in relation to dinners at the University. As a result the Committee had revised the Policy on Gifts and Hospitality

The Chair confirmed that he would add the foreward to the report prior to it being submitted to Council.

**RESOLVED** to note the Annual Report of the Standards Committee 2018-2019 and recommend it to Council.

## **22 REPORT ON THE ASSESSMENT OF COMPLAINTS**

The Committee was asked to consider the report and make any recommendations.

The Chair stated that any complaints received would be progressed to consider any breaches and both he and Tony Drew (Independent Person) would be notified.

The Monitoring Officer reported that there were two outstanding complaints, one which appeared as though it would require no further action and the other would proceed to an investigation.

There was a timescale in relation to complaints and usually if the issue was over six months old, it would not be progressed. There could be exceptions to this if the facts of the issue were clear. The Monitoring Officer referred to a previous authority where historic complaints had been submitted just before an election. It was agreed this was not the purpose of the Standards Committee. The Independent Person also had had experience of this.

**RESOLVED** to note the Report on the Assessment of Complaints.

## **23 WORKPLAN FOR THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Monitoring Officer suggested that in light of a possible investigation hearing, it would be sensible to have training on this. It was agreed that this would be added to the Workplan in November 2019.

Training session – Code of Conduct: the scenarios on best practice in using social media had been circulated to members to consider. The meeting discussed the answers to the scenarios and the issues raised.

**RESOLVED** to note the Workplan for the Standards Committee.

The meeting ended at 7.06 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**