

Standards Committee

Minutes of a remote meeting held on Tuesday 15 December 2020 at 6.00pm, which was broadcast live via the Council's YouTube Channel.

Present: Councillor Illingworth (Chairman); Councillors; Bartlett, J Dearing, A Dearing (late arrival), K Dickson, C Gifford, Grey, Margrave, Morris, and Weber.

Also Present:

Independent Persons: Mr R Tomkinson and Ms B Pyke.

Officers: Mrs L Dury (Principal Committee Services Officer); and Mr G Leach (Democratic Services Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer).

12. Apologies and Substitutes

There were no apologies for absence or substitutions made.

13. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

14. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 23 September 2020 were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the amendment of the resolution under minute number 11 whereby "Appendix 1" was amended to "Appendix A".

15. Local Government Association – Model Code of Conduct

The Committee considered a report from the Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer which sought approval to establish a small advisory group to review the District Council's Code of Conduct in light of the published model Code of Conduct from the Local Government Association.

In January 2019, the Committee of Standards in Public Life issued its report on Ethical Standards Best Practice for Local Authorities. This included 15 best practice recommendations for local authorities. Each Chief Executive was asked to provide a progress statement on these by 30 November 2020. Warwick District Council submitted its response, after consultation with the Chairman of this Committee on 20 November 2020.

As a result of the work of the Committee for Standards in Public Life report, the Local Government Association committed to producing an updated model code of conduct for local authorities.

The current Code of Conduct for Warwick District Council had been, less a few minor revisions, in place since 2012. Therefore, it was considered an appropriate time to review this Code, set out at Appendix 1 to the report, against the model Code of Conduct as launched on 3 December 2020, as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report.

Due to the technical and detailed nature of the work, it was recommended that this work was undertaken by the Democratic Services Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer with two members of this Committee and an Independent Person. They would then bring back any proposals to this Committee for consideration.

In undertaking this work, the Democratic Services Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer would also liaise with colleagues across Warwickshire on the potential for a common code across the County.

The District Council had committed to consultation with all Parish & Town Councils in Warwick District before making amendments to its Code of Conduct. This was because as the principal authority, this Council would be recommending its code to the Parish & Town Councils. Parish and Town Councils were not obliged to adopt the recommended Code from the District Council. The National Association of Local Councils had provided its own model code for a number of years and several Parish Councils in Warwick District had adopted this model.

The best practice recommendations from the Committee for Standards in Public Life also recommended that Principal Authorities should review their code of conduct each year and regularly seek, where possible, the views of the public, community organisations and neighbouring authorities. This had not been undertaken by this Council and this was considered an appropriate time to review this approach.

In response to a questions from Councillor Weber, the Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer explained that the main purpose of a Member "leaving the room" when an item on which they had a prejudicial or pecuniary interest in was mainly to stop them having influence over the other Members' decision making process. This "leaving the room" was essentially replicated by ensuring they logged out of remote meetings. However, since meetings were now live-streamed to the Internet, there was nothing to stop them watching the proceedings. It was something that the Working Group could give consideration to in its deliberations of the proposed Code of Conduct.

The Chairman explained that he was comfortable with more Councillors than recommended in the report sat on the Working Group providing it was a small group. He explained that a timeframe to deliver proposals would be reported back when further awaited guidance had been received. Once the Working Group had formulated its proposals, it would consult with Parish and Town Councils and then bring its final version of proposals to the Standards Committee for approval.

Resolved that

- (1) the Chairman of Standards Committee, Councillors Margrave and Weber, Independent Persons Mr Tomkinson and Ms Pyke work with the Democratic Services Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer to review the proposed Code of Conduct and bring forward any proposed revisions to this Council's Code; and

- (2) the Working Group provides Standards Committee with proposals on how the views of the public, community organisations and neighbouring authorities could be sought on any revisions to the Code.

(Councillor A Dearing joined the meeting at the start of this item.)

(The meeting ended at 6.18pm)

CHAIRMAN
29 June 2021