

Minutes of the Standards and Ethics Committee

County Hall, Worcester, WR5 2NP

Wednesday, 27 April 2022, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Bob Brookes (Chairman), Cllr Dan Boatright, Cllr David Chambers, Cllr Laura Gretton, Cllr Steve Mackay and Cllr Tom Wells

Also attended:

Independent Members (Non-voting): Dr Murray Mylechreest and Dr Philip Whiteman

Independent Person: Raymond Needham

Available papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated); and
- B. The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2021 (previously circulated).

302 Apologies and Named Substitutes (Agenda item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Dan Morehead and Cllr Mike Rouse.

303 Declarations of Interest (Agenda item 2)

None.

304 Public Participation (Agenda item 3)

None.

305 Confirmation of Minutes (Agenda item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Local Government Association Member Code of Conduct (Agenda item 5)

The Committee considered the Local Government Association Member Code of Conduct.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were made:

- The Chairman indicated that following its circulation to all members of the Council, he had received a number of queries/concerns about the revised Code. In addition, it was clear that the district councils were at different stages of consideration of the revised Code and this Committee needed to be cognisant of all feedback about the outcome of consideration of the proposed Code of Conduct by Worcestershire district councils before finalising its views. In addition, he argued that members of the Council should receive a briefing on the proposed changes to the Code. He therefore proposed that consideration of the item be deferred to a future Committee meeting
- It was confirmed that Wychavon District Council had adopted the revised Code without change
- Was it essential or desirable that a pan-Worcestershire Code of Conduct be adopted? Sheena Jones advised that the existing Code had been adopted on a pan-Worcestershire basis. Members would have a clearer understanding of what they were signing up to if a pan-Worcestershire approach was adopted
- The reference to the treatment of officers by members in the revised Code was welcomed. It should be recognised that the rough and tumble of political debate should not cross over into member relations with officers. However, it was queried how this amendment to the Code would relate to the Member/Officer Code of Conduct
- If a pan-Worcestershire Code was to be successfully adopted then procedurally it would make sense to wait until feedback had been received from all district council partners before final adoption by this Council
- It was possible that whatever version of the Code was adopted would need further revision in the future due to changes proposed by the Commission for Standards in Public Life
- An Independent Person highlighted the lack of clarity around issues of confidentiality for participants in training/briefing events
- The potential difficulties in terms of conflicts of interest for members who served on outside and other bodies needed to be recognised
- The role of Cabinet Members and officers needed to be made clearer so that there was a demarcation between the policy development and policy implementation. At present, it would appear that Cabinet Members had become involved in policy implementation and operational matters
- An Independent Member welcomed the acceptance in principle by the Government of the recommended change to the Code to provide legal indemnity to Independent Persons but expressed alarm that this had not been provided to this point

- It was important to circulate the district council endorsed final version of the Code to all members of the Council well in advance of consideration by full Council
- Sheena Jones would ensure that the revised Code included cross-references to the relevant Council policies.

RESOLVED that consideration of the item be deferred to a future Committee meeting to allow more time to receive feedback about the outcome of consideration of the proposed Code of Conduct by Worcestershire district councils and subject to a briefing being arranged on the revised Code for all members of the Council.

307 Recruitment of Independent Member (Agenda item 6)

The Committee considered the recruitment of Independent Member.

In the ensuing debate, the importance of advertising the post as widely as possible using relevant social media was stressed.

RESOLVED that the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance be authorised in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to finalise the detailed arrangements for the appointment of the independent member by the Committee based on the previous recruitment approach and making use of relevant social media.

The meeting ended at 10.30am.

Chairman