

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2025**

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Rushcliffe Arena,
Rugby Road, West Bridgford
and live streamed on Rushcliffe Borough Council's YouTube channel

PRESENT:

Councillors D Simms (Chair), T Birch, R Bird, A Phillips and A Wood
(Independent Member)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

C Richards (Independent Person)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

S Pregon
H Tambini

Monitoring Officer
Democratic Services Manager

APOLOGIES:

Councillors P Matthews and L Plant
Independent Member K White

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 February 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 6 February 2024 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

3 Cases and Work Update

The Monitoring Officer presented the Cases and Work Update report, which was an annual report on complaints received since the last meeting. The Committee was advised that since the last report, 13 complaints had been considered, with Table A of the Appendix detailing the outcome of the one complaint outstanding at the date of the last report, and Table B detailing new complaints, and it was noted that there was no common theme, which would led to recommending any specific training. It was noted that all decisions had been taken in consultation with the Council's two Independent Persons, and the Monitoring Officer thanked them both for their support.

In respect of conduct training for Parish Councils, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that this was delivered in consultation with the Nottinghamshire Association of Local Councils at the last Town and Parish Council Forum in March 2024.

The Monitoring Officer concluded by referring to a Government consultation on

proposals to strengthen the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England. The consultation was part of the Government's commitment to improve the Standard's regime, with responses invited from all interested parties, and the Monitoring Officer outlined details of the specific proposals and encouraged everyone to respond by the deadline of 26 February 2025.

Councillor Bird referred to the complaint received about the dress code and stated that without knowing any details of the complaint, it was difficult to know if it was valid, and he questioned what this particular complaint was, and why the Standards Committee was not given more details.

The Monitoring Officer advised that full details of complaints were only reported to the Committee when an investigation had taken place and concluded that a breach had been found, and then a sub-committee of this Committee would formally make a determination, which would be reported to the Committee. This was to maintain confidentiality and integrity in the process for all parties concerned. The Monitoring Officer advised that she could not give any further details regarding this complaint; however, after applying the initial test, and consulting the Independent Person, it was deemed that the Code of Conduct did not apply.

The Chair stated that there was a balance between confidentiality and guarding people against malicious complaints and it was for officers to apply the Code to decide if it should be escalated to this Committee.

The Monitoring Officer agreed and reminded members that the remit of the Committee was to maintain and uphold the high standards of the Code of Conduct and by bringing complaints to the Committee, it could make any recommendations for training or any improvements going forward.

Mr Wood stated that the available sanctions were exceedingly small, which made things difficult and unless they were strengthened there was little point in the process.

Mr Richards stated that as an Independent Person, he could confirm that the level of scrutiny of complaints that members were taking about was in place.

Councillor Bird felt that dress code should be clarified, and he would prefer to know if a complaint was made about him, so he could address that. The Monitoring Officer advised that when a complaint was received, the subject member would be informed and asked for their initial views, which would be shared with the Independent Person. The Committee noted that the Council did not have a dress code for Council meetings, apart from not allowing anything with a political slogan to be worn, although everyone was encouraged to dress appropriately.

The Chair felt that appropriate dress was subjective and it would be down to the locality to agree and could be difficult to enforce.

Councillor Phillips asked if it would be possible to have statistics from the last three or four years to identify the number and nature of complaints, as that

would be a useful guide and the Chair echoed those comments as this would be benchmarking, and he suggested that comparable authorities could be asked to share information.

The Monitoring Officer agreed to take that away as an action and circulate any information to the Committee and confirmed that last year there were also 13 complaints, so on a basic level there was consistency. The Committee agreed to receive the information electronically, and if there was anything that required scrutiny, then an additional meeting could be convened.

Councillor Birch agreed with previous comments that there were no powers, which made it difficult to take any action, and agreed that it would be helpful to have more data, although as the numbers were small, it was important to view the statistics carefully. Councillor Birch felt that it would be a positive step if the Government could do something to give councils greater powers to create an environment where people could participate in the democratic process, without fear and referred to previous problems experienced at Bingham Town Council, and he confirmed that he would be responding to the consultation.

The Chair stated that the Committee did work, as action had been taken in relation to that issue in Bingham, including a hearing, so currently checks were in place.

Mr Richards advised that although the Committee had little statutory powers, it did have a significant moral impact, leading many people to change their behaviour, without having to have a formal hearing.

It was RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.28 pm.

CHAIR