

Minutes of a meeting of the **STANDARDS PANEL** held in the Meeting Room 1, Council Offices, Priory Road, on Wednesday, 22 March 2017 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT

G R Aley (Chairman)  
R Clark (Vice-Chairman)

B Alcock      M G Chandler      P C Foyster      J L King

No Apologies for absence were received from or on behalf of Councillors

In Attendance: Executive Manager – Governance and the Independent Person, Tony Wicks.

1) **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

2) **MINUTES**

The Panel considered the minutes of the meeting held on 12 April 2016.

**DECISION:**

That the minutes be agreed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

3) **REVIEW OF STANDARDS ARRANGEMENTS AND CODE OF CONDUCT**

The Panel considered the report of the Executive Director - Strategy and Governance and Monitoring Officer inviting the Panel to review the Standards Arrangements and Code of Conduct to ensure that they are proportionate and fit for purpose.

Members noted that The Localism Act 2011 contained the current legislative arrangements for elected Member standards of conduct within local authorities. There was a duty on Councils under Sections 27 and 28 of the Localism Act 2011 to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by elected and co-opted members when acting in that capacity; to adopt a Code of Conduct which was consistent with the principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership; to have arrangements in place for the investigation of allegations and for the making of decisions on allegations. How this was achieved in each Council now involved a much greater degree of local choice than was available under the previous regime. The Council's current arrangements were adopted by Council in 2012. The arrangements and Code of Conduct had been revised to ensure that they were fit for purpose.

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In discussing the proposed new arrangements and revised Code of Conduct members noted that the monitoring officer had sought to streamline and improve the arrangements by:

- reducing the number of steps involved in dealing with a complaint
- removing the absolute requirement to seek local settlement at each stage
- highlighting examples of complaints that will not be considered under the Arrangements.
- providing greater discretion as to whether a complaint should progress
- providing formal Hearings procedures

The Independent Person, Mr Tony Wicks, had also considered the proposed arrangements and made the following comments:

- that it would be useful (under Appendix C) to require the provision of contact details of witnesses
- proposing an additional sanction of removal of decision-making power in respect of ward member budgets.

The Executive Manager for Governance asked members to consider whether it would be reasonable to withhold ward member budgets without making alternative arrangements so as to ensure that local groups and organisations were not disadvantaged.

### **DECISION:**

That the revised set of Local Arrangements for dealing with Standards Complaints and the amended Code of Conduct be recommended to Council for adoption, subject to the following amendments:

- i. deletion of the words 'if possible' from the Complaints Form (Appendix C), paragraph 4, bullet point 3; and
- ii. the addition of a sanction to the Arrangements (Appendix B) and Hearing Procedures (Appendix D) to the effect that a member may be prevented from making decisions on their ward member budget, if found in breach of the Code of Conduct in a matter related to their ward budget, and that administration of the budget be instead dealt with by another member for that ward or, if there is no other member, an officer.

## **4) STANDARDS ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17**

The Panel considered a report by the Executive Manager – Governance setting out information relating to work undertaken since the previous annual report made to the Standards Panel April 2016 along with the Independent Person's comments.

Councillors noted that 5 complaints had been received during the period April 2016-March 2017. 3 complaints were not relevant to the Code of Conduct, 1 complaint

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had been withdrawn and the remaining complaint was in the process of being considered.

Members asked that further detail be included in future reports, such as the outcome of Police referrals.

**DECISION:**

That the Standards Annual Report 2016-2017 be noted and that the content of the report be reviewed for future years.

5) **ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES.**

There were no urgent items.

(The meeting ended at 7.25 pm)

(End of minutes)