

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 20 March 2024.

PRESENT: Mr J A Kite, MBE (Chair), Mr D Jeffrey, Mr C Simkins, Dr L Sullivan, Mr P J Oakford and Mr B J Sweetland

ALSO PRESENT: Mr B Watts (General Counsel) and Mr T Godfrey (Senior Governance Manager)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies

(Item)

Apologies were received from Ms Parfitt and Mr Love for whom respectively Mr Oakford and Mr Sweetland were present as substitutes.

2. Declarations of Interest

(Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2022

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held 9 May 2022 were a correct record and that a paper copy be signed by the Chair.

4. Verbal Update from Monitoring Officer

(Item 4)

- a. Mr Watts said that as part of the actions from the Annual Governance Statement, he had committed to producing a report on Member behaviour and the Standards Committee would see any concerns raised.
- b. It was felt that the culture had changed for Members after the pandemic and the nature of Standards complaints had also changed. Members making complaints under the Code of Conduct about another Member had been unheard of prior to the current term of office but these were now making up the majority of complaints submitted.
- c. Then, Members resolved:

That, under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following business on the grounds

that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2 of part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual).

- d. It was agreed that the exempt discussion take place following item 6 and the meeting continued in open session.

5. Proposed Revisions to the Kent Code of Member Conduct (Item 5)

- a. Mr Godfrey introduced the report. Members were asked to consider amendments to the Kent Code of Conduct for Members. The proposed amendments built on changes recommended by the Kent Secretaries Group in response to the publication of the LGA Model Code of Conduct and discussed by the Committee at its previous meeting.
- b. Further to questions from Members, it was noted that:
- The model code produced by the LGA responded to the recommendations made by the Committee for Standards in Public Life (CSPL), which had raised concerns about increased incidences of poor behaviour nationally in the local government sector.
 - The majority of the CSPL recommendations were for central government and at the time of the meeting, the legislation remained unchanged.
 - The Kent Secretaries Group had concerns about the LGA Model Code wholesale but drew on it in producing a revised Kent Code.
 - It was recognised that there would be continuous development and there would be further work done in the future.
 - The changes to the wording of the Kent Code of Member Conduct were proposed and agreed.
- c. Resolved to recommend to County Council that the Constitution be amended with the changes agreed by this Committee.

6. Proposed Revisions to Arrangements for Dealing with Code of Conduct Complaints (Item 6)

- a. Mr Godfrey introduced the report.
- b. In response to questions from Members, it was noted that:
- The Kent Secretaries Group had reviewed the procedures, with the intention of making the arrangements more coherent and practical, based on experience.
 - The revised arrangements are intended to be accessible and easy to use, not legalistic.
- c. Concerns were raised about how malicious complaints about Members would be handled and there was a request that there be a way of reporting back when there had been no breach of the Code of Conduct.

- d. Members requested that the differences between the current arrangements and the proposed changes be presented more clearly.
- e. RESOLVED that the proposed revised arrangements for handling Member complaints be brought back to the Standards Committee with clarity on the proposed changes.