

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**ETHICS AND STANDARDS**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER**

**16TH APRIL 2018 (6PM)**

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**Present:**

Councillors: N Gale (Chairman), J R Desmond (Vice-Chairman), V Higgs and R J Vale.

**Co-opted Member:** Mr R Reynolds.

**Observers:**

There were no members present as observers.

**ES.1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor I Hardiman and Parish Council Representatives L Green and R Hobson.

**ES.2 Appointment of Substitutes**

No substitutes were appointed.

**ES.3 Declarations of Interests by Members**

No declarations of interest were made.

**ES.4 Minutes**

**Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

**ES.5 Local Government Ethical Standards – Calls for Evidence**

The Committee received a report from the Monitoring Officer which invited Members to consider responses to the Local Government Ethical Standards Committee calls for Evidence.

The review of Local Government Ethical Standards was currently being undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life. Robust standards arrangements were needed to safeguard local democracy, maintain high standards of conduct, and to protect ethical practice in local government.

The Monitoring Officer advised that feedback on the consultation had been sought from Committee Members, and following a meeting with the Chair and Vice Chair, concerns had been raised in relation to the lack of sanctions

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available to Local Authorities when dealing with Councillors who had breached the code of conduct.

The Monitoring Officer reminded Members that prior to 2011, sanctions available under the Local Government Standards Board was suspension or partial suspension as a Councillor for up to 6 months (maximum sanction) and first-tier tribunal suspension for up to 12 months. Other sanctions included censure, apology, reconciliation or requirement to complete training. She added that the introduction of the Localism Act 2011 substantially altered the prevailing Local Government Standards regime in England, censure or removal from a committee were the only sanctions currently available to Local Authorities, and there was no enforcement mechanism behind any recommendations from Standards Committee's. The Monitoring Officer was pleased to report that Wyre Forest District Council had a strong Group Structure and was able to work with Group Leaders and the Independent Persons panel to address any potential breaches of the code of conduct.

The Chairman said that the lack of sanctions was a concern, in particular when dealing with breaches of the code as a result of the mis-use of social media. She added that there was a fine line between 'getting it right' and causing offence, she felt that there was currently no deterrent for the minority of Councillors who repeatedly disregard the guidelines set out in the Council's Social Media Policy.

The Committee discussed the issue of intimidation towards local Councillors and agreed that social media was the main platform for abuse and intimidation to take place.

The Monitoring Officer thanked the Committee for their input which would be incorporated into the consultation responses.

**Agreed: Appropriate responses be sent to the Local Government Ethical Standards Review.**

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 6.17pm.