

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

ETHICS AND STANDARDS

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

8 SEPTEMBER 2021 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: A L L'Huillier (Chairman), S Griffiths (Vice-Chairman),
B S Dawes, I Hardiman, S Miah and M Rayner.

Independent Person: T Hipkiss

Co-opted Members:

Independent Member: R Reynolds

Independent Member: Rev J A Cox

Parish Council Representatives: Councillors R Drew and D Killingworth

Observers:

Councillors: G W Ballinger, H E Dyke, N Martin and P W M Young.

ES.01 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Parish Councillor W Mack.

ES.02 Appointment of Substitutes

No substitutes were appointed.

ES.03 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

ES.04 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd March 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

Councillor M Rayner was present at the meeting as an observer.

The Chairman made the following statement:

I have been on Ethics and Standards committee since being elected on to the council in 2019. Quite a bit of this time has been spent wondering what the purpose of the committee is and how it serves the broader council and the public we represent. Encouraged greatly by the work that was started by our previous chair Mary, myself and Deputy Chair Susie, have over recent months, pushed and challenged constantly to find ways we can bring back some much

needed “teeth”.

I really hope this committee will be willing to support us in taking a zero tolerance stance on all behaviour that fails to uphold our code of conduct, resulting in formal complaint from either a colleague, member of the public, council employee or officer. Myself, Susie and Caroline will be working with Ian and other officers seeking methods to introduce a robust and ethical framework, that will hold members accountable for their actions in a fair and transparent manner, and will open up standards procedures to public gaze. The ultimate aim will be to encourage a kind, honest and fair environment for us all to work in.

ES.05 Report on Conduct Procedures

The Committee received a report from the Solicitor to the Council which provided Councillors with a brief refresher note on the Statutory shape of the Council's Corporate Governance framework and Code of Conduct procedure and the updating of the pan-Worcestershire Code of Conduct following the report of the Committee for Standards in Public Life (CSPL).

The Solicitor to the Council presented the report and gave a summary of the confidential advice/triage process undertaken by the Monitoring Officer (MO) when presented with potential complaints, concerns or enquiries.

The Committee were advised that any matter that reaches the Standards Committee means that an informal resolution has either failed or not been possible. Members were reminded that the Standards Committee has limited Statutory sanctions, which are unenforceable. She added that in matters relating to a Parish or Town Council, the District has no powers other than making a recommendation to the relevant Council who can choose to accept or reject any proposal.

The Committee discussed the report and welcomed the commitment of the Officers, Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee to consider introducing measures, using the Council's corporate governance framework, to address proven breaches of the code of conduct by Members.

Decision: The Committee noted:

- 1.1 the advice/triage process for potential complaints/conduct matters;**
- 1.2 the current discussions for updating the pan-Worcestershire Code of Conduct following previous discussions at this Committee.**

ES.06 Complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman 2020/21

The Committee received a report from the Chief Executive on the outcome of complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in accordance with Council Policy for the period of 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021.

Decision: The report be noted.

ES.07 Possible Options in Case of Finding of Breach of Code of Conduct

The Committee received a briefing note from the Chief Executive and Solicitor to the Council on the range of actions that are being looked at in cases where there is a breach of the code.

The Solicitor to the Council advised that for open and transparency, the note had been included on the agenda at the request of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 6.47pm.