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Minutes of the meeting of the **Standards Committee** held virtually on Monday 25 January 2021 at 9.30 am

Members present: Mr R Plowman (Chairman), Mrs C Apel, Mrs C Purnell, Mrs S Sharp, Mr A Sutton,

Parish representatives present: Mr D Ribbens and Mr J Galego

Independent Members present: Mr A J Plytas

Not present: Mrs S Taylor and Mr R Cooper

Officers present all items: Mr Nicholas Bennett (Divisional Manager, Democratic Services) Mrs F Baker (Democratic Services Officer)

9 **Chairman's Announcements**

Mr Plowman welcomed everyone present.

Apologies for absence had been received from Mrs Susan Taylor and Mr Ray Cooper (Lurgashall Parish Council) one of the three Parish Council representatives.

Mr Plowman confirmed that there were no urgent items for consideration under agenda item 7.

10 **Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 10 September 2015 were noted by the Standards Committee.

Resolved;

The Standards Committee noted the minutes of the meeting held 10 September 2015.

11 **Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest made.

12 **Public Question Time**

No public questions had been submitted.

13 **Model Code of Conduct**

Mr Plowman introduced the report to the Committee. He drew the Committee's attention to page 11 of the Agenda pack and read out the Joint Statement. Mr Plowman then invited Mr Bennett to present the report to the Committee and then responded to comments and questions from members.

To clarify Mr Bennett explained to the Committee that the figure of £25 quoted on page 8 of the agenda pack under paragraph 3.9, item I, was incorrect and should be discarded and replaced with the correct figure; £50 which is quoted on page 19 of the agenda pack.

Members discussed the use and influence of social media platforms such as Facebook. Mr Bennett drew members' attention to pages 14 and 15 of the Agenda pack which set out how councillors were expected to behave and explained that this applied to the way in which they used social media. He also informed the Committee that the council have a separate Social Media Policy, this is overseen by Mrs Parker in her role as Public Relations Manager, the policy is currently being updated but acknowledged that it would be sensible to share the policy with members. Mr Bennett explained that the Association of Democratic Service Officers (ADSO) was also currently preparing a model document on the use of Social Media which would reflect the new model code of conduct; once this was available it would be shared with members. Mr Bennett reminded the Committee that whilst councillors should be mindful about how they use social media and the comments they may post, they should not feel that they had to tolerate abuse from other users.

Members enquired if there was a role for Monitoring Officers from other authorities when considering Standard's cases, to provide an unbiased opinion. Mr Bennett explained that whilst in principal he had no objection to fellow Monitoring Officers being involved, the role of the Independent Person was to provide an unbiased opinion when cases were being considered. He commended Mr Plytas in his role as an Independent Person and informed the Committee that Mr Plytas had provided an invaluable service in this role.

In response to a question from the Committee regarding the introduction of new sanctions, Mr Bennett explained that new sanctions could only be endorsed by central government. He informed the committee that as he understood the introduction of new sanctions, were still very much due to be endorsed by the present government and were just awaiting a date for when they would be considered. The introduction of the new sanctions will offer a more balanced range of sanctions from apologies and training, to more serious sanctions such as suspension. He acknowledged members comments that it would be helpful to include the sanctions available as an appendix to the Code of Conduct.

Members of the Committee asked for clarification about how the Code of Conduct applied to the Parishes. Mr Bennett explained that Parish Councils would need to adopt their own Code of Conduct, but they would be encouraged to adopt the same model code of conduct to ensure consistency and prevent councillors who represented more than one authority from having to sign up to more than one code

of conduct. He informed the committee that there would be an agenda item on the New Model Code of Conduct at the forthcoming All Parishes meeting. Mr Plowman added that Chichester City Council had adopted the New Model Code of Conduct at a recent finance meeting.

Members agreed that it would be good to have consistency across the tiers of authority. The Parish representatives added that as well as adopting the same code of conduct, parish councillors should also be given access to the same training as District Councillors. Mr Bennett acknowledged the comments and agreed that this would be a sensible approach, remote training could be provided to assist parishes in how to apply the code.

Resolved;

The Standards Committee recommend to Full Council adoption of the Local Government Association “Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020”.

14 Independent Persons Report

Mr Plowman thanked both Mr Plytas and Mr Newman for their service as an independent person. He then invited Mr Bennett to present the report to the Committee.

Mr Bennett explained the role of the Independent Person and why it was so important that the council appointed at least one, ideally two should be appointed. Mr Bennett was currently seeking confirmation as to how long an Independent Person may be appointed, and would follow up outside the meeting.

**Following the meeting Mr Bennett received confirmation that an Independent Person may be appointed for no longer than two years.*

Mr Bennett then answered questions and comments from the members.

Resolved;

That the Standards Committee:

2.1 Thank Mr Newman and Mr Plytas for their contributions to the work of the Committee as Independent Persons over several years.

2.2 Authorise the Monitoring Officer to undertake a process to advertise the role of Independent Persons

2.3 That the Chairman of Standards be authorised to create and chair an interview panel for the Independent Persons following the advertising process.

2.4 That the Chairman be authorised to recommend such persons as the interview panel considers appropriate to Full Council to the position of Independent Person.

15 Late Items

There were no late items for consideration.

16 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

There were no restricted items for consideration.

The meeting ended at 10.30 am

CHAIRMAN

Date: