

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2021 at 5.30 pm by Video Conference.

Present: Mr Peter Tucker (Chairman); Councillors J Bayford, Crittenden, Dexter, Fellows, Kup, Quittenden (Minster Parish Council), Crow-Brown (Minster Parish Council), Patricia Causier (Independent Member of the Standards Committee), Peter Lorenzo (Independent Member of the Standards Committee) and Lee Wellbrook (Independent Member of the Standards Committee)

In Attendance: Cllr Whitehead

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was proposed by Mr Tucker seconded by Cllr Crittenden and agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November are a correct record.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair presented his report to the Committee. There were no questions.

5. FULL COUNCIL QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Cllr Whitehead spoke under council procedure rule 20.1

Nicholas Hughes, Committee Services Manager, presented the report noting that a previous report on extending the word limit for questions had been to council in Dec 2020 and Council had not raised any objections to the extension but did return it to the CRWP to look into an appeals process and the right to ask supplementary questions.

He explained that the CRWP had recommended to the Standards Committee the following:

1. It was decided not to recommend to the Standards Committee the introduction of an appeals process for rejected questions.
2. That the Standards Committee discuss further whether to allow Members of the public to ask supplementary questions.
3. That, when the Chief Executive considers rejecting a question, they should consult with the Chairman of the Council first.
4. That information on the process for submitting questions and the support available is shared at full council and on social media.

The Committee then discussed the report and made the following points:

- The public are told the specific reason why if their question is rejected.
- The appeals process was widely considered unnecessary.
- All questions received are put in the agenda, if time runs out during the meeting any remaining questions would be answered in writing.

- The previously proposed increase of the word limit for questions from 50 to 150 words would allow for additional comments to be made within the original question. Consequently it was felt by some that supplementary questions would not be necessary.
- Concern was raised that supplementary questions would create opportunity for making a personal attack or attempting to catch out councillors.
- It was considered that it would add another layer of confidence for the public if questions which are likely to be rejected for subjective reasons were shared with the Chair to gain their opinion as well.
- Rejected questions already go to the Monitoring Officer and then to the Chief Executive, so are already seen by more than one person.

It was proposed by Mr Tucker and seconded by Cllr Kup and agreed by Members that the Standards Committee recommend to Council that:

- Full Council does not introduce an appeals process for rejected questions.

It was proposed by Mr Tucker and seconded by Mr Lorenzo that the Standards Committee recommend to Council that:

- Full Council allows members of the public to ask supplementary questions.

This proposal was put to a vote and FELL.

It was proposed by Mr Tucker and seconded by Cllr Fellows and agreed by Members that the Standards Committee recommend to Council that:

- Full Council does not allow members of the public to ask supplementary questions.

It was proposed by Mr Tucker and seconded by Cllr Crittenden and agreed by Members that the Standards Committee recommend to Council that:

- When the Chief Executive considers rejecting a question, they should consult with the Chair of the Council first.

It was proposed by Mr Tucker and seconded by Cllr Fellows and agreed by Members that the Standards Committee recommend to Council that:

- Information on the process for submitting questions and the support available is shared at full council and on social media.

It was proposed by Mr Tucker and seconded by Cllr Fellows and agreed by Members that the Standards Committee recommend to Council that:

- The word limit for questions from Councillors and Members of the Public be increased from 50 to 150.

6. **STANDARDS COMPLAINT STATISTICS**

Members noted the Standards statistics for March 2020 to March 2021.

Meeting concluded : 6.15 pm