

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2014 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Independent Members of the Standards Committee: Dr Jonathan Sexton (Chairman); Janet Bacon (Independent Member of the Standards Committee) Councillors: E Green, Johnston, Marson, Nicholson, Roberts, M Tomlinson, Cllr Mrs Fletcher (Manston Parish Council), Lawson (Broadstairs Town Council) and Way (Monkton Parish Council)

In Attendance: Mr James and D Green

71. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

72. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of absence.

73. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Marson raised the issue that she wanted the minutes to be changed to make it clear that she had made the comments in item 66 of the minutes that the Committee had run the risk of sounding self-pitying and had missed the point of the debate.

The Corporate and Regulatory Services Manager explained that it would not be possible to change the minutes as they had been published, but that her point regarding item 66 of the minutes of the meeting of the 21 November 2013 would be recorded in the minutes of this meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Johnston and seconded by Town Councillor Lawson that:

The minutes of the meeting of 21 November be agreed as a correct record and that the Standards Committee notes the letter contained within those minutes from the Local Government Association regarding the Councillors Code of Conduct.

74. SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS

The Corporate Information Manager presented her report to the Committee outlining the key points explaining that social media was a useful tool for Councillors; however Councillors had to be aware of the risks. The guidance contained within the report would assist them with understanding those risks.

Members discussed the report, one Member raised that the golden rules outlined in the attached guidance regarding not following constituents on Twitter or Facebook as it may make them feel uncomfortable seemed to conflict with other parts of the guidance document. The Corporate Information Manager acknowledged that this

could be amended to be clearer and was a reference regarding being cautious about who Councillors followed.

Members also emphasised how important it was to exercise caution when using social media and cited personal examples.

It was proposed by Councillor Nicholson and seconded by Councillor Johnston:

That it be recommended to Council that the Social Media Guidance for Councillors, as attached at Annex 1, be approved and included in Part 5 – Codes and Protocols of the Council's Constitution.

75. CIPFA CODE OF PRACTICE ON TREASURY MANAGEMENT

The Corporate and Regulatory Services Manager outlined the report to the Committee.

Members commented that the proposals would be very beneficial to the Council and would strengthen Corporate Governance.

It was proposed by Councillor Johnston and seconded by Town Councillor Lawson that:

The Standards Committee recommends to Council:

1. That the clauses as set out in Annex 1 to the report be approved;
2. That the consequential changes to the responsibilities of the Section 151 Officer in relation to Treasury Management, as set out at Annex 2 to the report, be approved.

76. RECORDED VOTES AT BUDGET MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL - TO AMEND COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 21

The Corporate and Regulatory Services Manager outlined the report clarifying that a recorded vote would be required when setting the budget and when the Council set its element of the Council Tax.

Members expressed the opinion that utilising the existing electronic voting system should also be encouraged in the future.

It was proposed by Councillor Johnston and seconded by Councillor E Green that:

The Standards Committee recommends to Council that Council Procedure Rule 21 be amended as follows:

New Council Procedure Rule 21.6

"21.6 Recorded votes at Council budget decision meetings

A recorded vote will be required at a meeting of the Council on motions, amendments or substantive motions relating to the approval of the budget or setting of council tax, whereby there shall be recorded in the minutes the names of the Members who cast a vote for the motion/ amendment or against the motion/amendment or who abstained from voting. As this is a mandatory

standing order under the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) Regulations 2001, it cannot be suspended under Council Procedure 29.1.”

Amended Council Procedure Rule 21.3

“21.3 Show of hands

Unless a recorded vote is demanded under Rule 21.4 **or required under Rule 21.6**, the Chairman will take the vote by show of hands (and a count if requested), or by means of an electronic voting system, or if there is no dissent, by the affirmation of the meeting.”

77. BUSINESS CONSIDERED AT BUDGET-SETTING MEETINGS - TO REVIEW COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 2.0

The Corporate and Regulatory Services Manager outlined the report explaining that normally many other standard items of business were discussed at budget setting meetings and that the report suggested a number of options regarding reducing the number of these items at budget meetings.

Members discussed the report and raised the point that often the budget meeting was a long meeting. In addition it was also mentioned that often items at the end of a long agenda such as the budget meeting were not discussed in as great a depth as others at shorter meetings, which was unfair.

It was proposed by Councillor Johnston and seconded by Councillor M Tomlinson that Standards Committee recommends to Council:

- 1) That Option 1 be adopted, namely, to exclude from the budget-setting meeting agendas all items that do not relate to the budget, with the exception of the essential items of apologies for absence, minutes of previous meeting and declarations of interests, subject to a qualification as follows:
 - subject to the Chairman having discretion to accept additional items; but only in exceptional or urgent circumstances.
- 2) That the suggested amendment to Council Procedure Rule 2.0 to take account option 1, as set out at Annex 1, be approved.

78. TO REVIEW APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTES TO ATTEND MEETINGS

The Corporate and Regulatory Services Manager outlined the report explaining that there were two options: either that substitutions would only be allowed from the same political group or that they would be allowed from any political group and that a case could be put for either option.

He also clarified that the Standards Committee could also consider the issue of how substitute members were notified to Democratic Services under this agenda item.

Members discussed the report and expressed the view that they felt that substitutions should only be allowed from the same political group.

Members also considered whether to amend the rules surrounding who could register substitutions. Members expressed the view that they felt the flexibility of the

current arrangements where a group whip or an individual Councillor could register a substitution was helpful.

It was proposed by Councillor Johnston and seconded by Town Councillor Lawson that:

- 1) The Standards Committee recommends to Council that Council Procedure Rule 5 and Clause 9 of the Protocol for the Guidance of Planning Committee Members and Officers be amended, as indicated at Annexes 1 and 2 respectively.
- 2) The Standards Committee recommends to the Council that the existing rules on who can register substitutes remain the same.

79. REGISTERS OF INTERESTS AND GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY FOR OFFICERS - TO AMEND FINANCIAL PROCEDURE RULES TO REFLECT CURRENT PRACTICE

The Committee Services Manager outlined the report explaining that the proposed changes outlined in the report amended the Council's constitution to reflect existing practice.

Members queried whether the S.151 Officer had reported all irregularities to Cabinet as per the constitution as set out in Annex 1 to the report. The Corporate and Regulatory Services Manager responded that all confirmed irregularities should be reported to the Cabinet and the Governance and Audit Committee and suspected irregularities should be reported to the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Audit and to the Governance and Audit Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor E Green and seconded by Councillor Johnston that:

The Standards Committee recommends to Council that the amendment as shown at Annex 1 to the report be approved.

80. STANDARDS COMPLAINT STATISTICS

The Standards Committee noted the Standards Complaint Statistics.

Meeting concluded: 7.45 pm