

Standards Committee Minutes

The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting of Wyre Borough Council held on Thursday, 18 March 2021 virtually via Webex.

Standards Committee members present:

Councillors Catterall, Sir R Atkins, Gerrard, Swales and Orme

Apologies for absence:

None

Other councillors present:

None

Officers present:

Liesl Hadgraft, Head of Business Support and Monitoring Officer
Mary Grimshaw, Legal Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Duncan Jowitt, Democratic Services Officer
Marianne Unwin, Assistant Democratic Services Officer

Independent members present:

Barry Parsonage

No members of the public or press attended the meeting.

7 Declarations of Interest

None

8 Minutes

The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting of 19 November 2020 were approved as a correct record.

9 Model Code of Conduct

The Monitoring Officer (MO) submitted a report providing the latest update on the Model Councillor Code of Conduct (MCCC) after the LGA had circulated the revised MCCC on 23 December 2020 following a lengthy consultation period.

The MO explained that the MCCC set out in detail the standards expected of councillors and that in many areas, the content was similar to that already included in Wyre's current Code, although it included more explanatory notes in terms of definitions.

She informed the committee that the LGA, in association with ADSO, intended to produce further guidance to accompany the MCCC, which we hoped might be available by the end of April 2021.

She also pointed out that the MCCC did not suggest the introduction of additional sanctions for any breaches of the Code as that would require a change in the legislation and suggested that it may be some time before the Government considered doing so.

Decision

The committee agreed to wait until we had received the additional guidance and then at the next Standards Committee meeting, consider setting up a working group to review Wyre's Code in line with the MCCC.

10 CSPL local government ethical standards 15 best practice recommendations

The MO pointed out that, as Wyre already had the majority of the best practice recommendations in place, there was no cause for concern.

Decision

The committee agreed that, when the working group reviewed Wyre's Code of Conduct, the best practice recommendations would form part of that process.

11 Current Complaints: Summary

The MO had reported on the first three complaints listed on the schedule at the November 2020 Standards Committee meeting. Those had been progressed since that meeting and that there were six new complaints.

2020/02

This complaint had been ongoing for some time and the IP, MO and Subject Member (SM) had held a number of meetings in an attempt to deal with the matter informally. Those meetings had been unsuccessful and the procedure had moved to the next stage. There was a possibility that a formal hearing would be necessary, however this would not happen until after the elections in May 2021. **Complaint ongoing.**

2020/05

Following an interview with the SM, the IP and MO had concluded that no breach of the code had occurred. **No further action.**

2020/06

The MO had reported at the November meeting that she had requested

further information about this complaint. The MO had now received this and the IP and MO had concluded that the SM was not acting in their capacity as a Councillor and therefore no breach of the code had occurred. **No further action.**

2020/07

A member of the public had submitted a complaint against a Town/Parish Councillor alleging inappropriate behaviour and disrespect at a Wyre Council meeting that the SM had attended. On reviewing the recording and the minutes from the meeting, the IP and MO concluded that the SM was attending as a member of the public and therefore no breach of the code had occurred. **No further action.**

2020/08

Two complaints had been received about a Wyre Councillor and their activity on social media. The IP and MO had reviewed the postings and concluded no breach of the code had occurred. **No further action.**

2020/09

Although initially registered as a complaint, the MO had resolved the matter informally by providing advice to the Town/Parish council on how to deal with the matter that had occurred. **No further action.**

2020/10

A member of the public had complained about a Town/Parish Councillor. Since the publishing of the papers for this meeting, a meeting with the SM has taken place. The MO had requested further information from the complainant to support the allegations. **Complaint on-going.**

2021/01

Complaint from two Wyre Councillors about another Wyre Councillor's behaviour at a Council meeting. The IP and MO had viewed the recordings of the meetings and interviewed the SM. **In the process of being concluded.**

2021/02

Complaint from a Wyre Councillor about the behaviour of a number of Wyre Councillors at a Council meeting, with allegations of a number of principles having been breached. The IP and MO had viewed the recordings, held discussions with Members and had dealt with the matter informally. **In the process of being concluded.**

Behaviour at virtual meetings

One of the complainants had also passed comment on the behaviour of some of the Wyre Councillors at a meeting stating that some members were not paying attention or looked disinterested, etc. The MO explained that although that might not specifically breach the Code, it could give a negative impression to the public about how the council carries out its business and asked that Members remember that, during webcast meetings, the public could observe every move and facial expression.

The MO also made a general point ,stating that having access to the

recordings of meetings has been beneficial when reviewing complaints and that going forward, as long as meetings were being streamed, the recordings would be retained for 6 months online. The MO would retain the recordings for a further 12 months in an archive to assist with the process of dealing with complaints.

Future Reporting

The MO said by members of the committee and had raised the issue of reporting of complaints previously and that she was conscious of having to maintain a balance, when going through the schedule, between updating members fully and withholding any information that might compromise any future formal process. She had therefore considered whether it could be done differently at future meetings. Discussions with the Democratic Services team had taken place and they had undertaken research to determine what process other councils were following regarding the reporting of complaints.

She suggested that at future meetings the reporting of complaints the MO might provide the data in a more statistical manner. This could provide members with a breakdown of complaints that were occurring and whether they are Borough or Town/Parish and the types of allegations being reported. This could assist with future development and training for members as a whole. For example, if social media was generating a high number of complaints, we could support members with this.

The MO also suggested that the complaints only be reported twice yearly.

Decision

The committee agreed that the complaints summary would be provided biannually rather than to each meeting of the committee, that three Standard Committee meetings would be scheduled each year and that any meeting where there was no business to transact would, in consultation with the Chairman, be cancelled.

Mrs Hadgraft informed the committee that she had decided to finish working at Wyre and that it would be her last attendance at a Standards Committee meeting. The Chairman wished her the very best in her retirement and the committee expressed their gratitude for her contribution whilst in the MO role.

12 Date of next Meeting

Noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Committee was scheduled to be held at 6pm on Thursday 17 June 2021

The meeting started at 6.01 pm and finished at 6.38 pm.

Date of Publication: 24 March 2021