

Standards Committee Minutes

The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting of Wyre Borough Council held on Tuesday, 7 February 2017 at the Civic Centre, Poulton-le-Fylde.

Standards Committee members present:

Councillors I Amos, M Anderton, B Birch (Chairman), R Duffy, Moon and Michael Vincent.

Officers present to advise the Committee: Mary Grimshaw (Senior Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer) and Peter Foulsham (Scrutiny Officer).

Also present: Mike Dudfield (Investigating Officer), Helen Kay (Independent Person), Roy Saunders (Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager), five members of the public and two members of the press.

10 Exclusion of Public and Press

In the absence of the Subject Member, Councillor Patricia Greenhough, the committee wished to discuss whether to adjourn the matter to another date or to proceed in her absence.

The committee passed the following resolution:

“That the public and press be excluded from the meeting whilst this matter is being considered, because it refers to exempt information as defined in category 1 (information relating to any individual) of Part 1 of Schedule 12(a) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Variation Order 2006 and, that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.”

The meeting continued in private session and considered issues related to the additional documents that were “Not for Publication” because they contained “exempt information” as defined in Schedule 12(a) of the Local Government Act 1972.

11 Absence of Subject Member

The meeting re-convened in public session.

The Chairman, Councillor B Birch, said that having considered all the relevant information the committee had decided to go ahead with the hearing in the absence of Councillor Patricia Greenhough. Taking into account all the evidence, the committee considered that it would be preferable for all concerned in the matter to continue the hearing in her absence to enable the matter to be brought to a speedy conclusion.

12 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Moon declared an Other Significant Interest in item 3 on the agenda as he was a Wyre Councillor for Preesall Ward. However, Councillor Moon said that this would not prejudice his judgement and he continued to play a full part in the meeting.

13 Code of Conduct: Alleged breach by Cllr Patricia Greenough, Preesall Town Council

The Investigating Officer, Mike Dudfield, presented his report and findings, copies of which had previously been circulated to the Committee.

The Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager also referred to the contents of an email sent to him by the Subject Member on 3 February 2017 setting out her comments on the investigation report. The email was “not for publication” because it contained personal information about individuals, but copies were circulated to and were read by members of the Committee.

Mr Dudfield gave a detailed chronological account of events, referring to the contents of his report, and drew the following conclusions:

- i. At the meeting of 9 May 2016 Councillor Patricia Greenhough was acting in her official capacity as a councillor so it was covered by the Code of Conduct.
- ii. It was likely that the allegations made by Councillor Patricia Greenhough regarding a closed Santander bank account and the transfer of funds were based on an over-heard conversation that had been mis-heard.
- iii. There were many inconsistencies in the evidence provided by Councillor Patricia Greenhough.
- iv. There had been no Santander bank account in the name of Preesall Town Council; there was no primary evidence.
- v. Local Authority councillors were responsible to their communities. Any councillor believing that £2,000 had gone missing had a responsibility to take some action by referring the matter to the Council, or to the External Auditor or to the police.

- vi. The allegation by Councillor Vivien Taylor that Councillor Patricia Greenhough's address to Preesall Town Council on 9 May 2016 included incorrect statements and had brought the Town Council into disrepute was not proven as 'disrepute' related to the position of the councillor or the Town Council in the community and these comments were made in private session.
- vii. Councillor Patricia Greenhough had breached paragraph 1 bullet point 8 of the Town Council's Code of Conduct by not promoting and supporting high standards of conduct in the manner in which she pursued her arguments concerning the existence of the Santander account and surrounding issues, therefore improperly impugning the integrity and professionalism of the former Clerk.

Members of the committee asked Mr Dudfield several questions by way of clarification.

The committee retired with the Deputy Monitoring Officer, the Independent Person and the Scrutiny Officer to consider, in private session, all the information that had been presented to them. They then returned to publicly announce the Committee's decision, as follows:

RESOLVED that

- (i) The Standards Committee, having considered all the evidence presented, accept the Investigating Officer's findings and conclude that Councillor Patricia Greenhough, by improperly impugning the integrity and professionalism of the former Clerk to Preesall Town Council, Miss Jan Finch, at the meeting of Preesall Town Council on 9 May 2016, did breach paragraph 1 bullet point 8 of Preesall Town Council's Code of Conduct by not promoting and supporting high standards of conduct, by the manner in which she pursued the argument concerning the existence of the Santander account and surrounding issues.
- (ii) The Standards Committee is only able to make recommendations to Preesall Town Council. The Standards Committee asks that Preesall Town Council note the findings of the Committee and that the breach be publicly recorded in the minutes of a meeting of the Town Council. The Standards Committee finds no evidence of any wrongdoing by Miss Jan Finch.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and finished at 7.41 pm.