

Standards Committee Minutes

The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting of Wyre Borough Council held on Thursday, 20 June 2019 at the CivicCentre, Poulton-le-Fylde.

Standards Committee members present:

Councillors Catterall, R Atkins, Gerrard and Orme.

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Beavers.

Officers present:

Mary Grimshaw, Senior Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Liesl Hadgraft, Head of Business Support and Monitoring Officer
Roy Saunders, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager
Emma Keany, Governance Trainee.

No members of the public or press attended the meeting.

1 Election of Chairman 2019/20

Agreed that Councillor Catterall be elected as Chairman of the Committee for 2019/20.

2 Election of Vice-Chairman 2019/20

Agreed to defer the election of a Vice-Chairman for 2019/20 until the next meeting of the Committee.

3 Declarations of Interest

None.

4 Minutes

Agreed that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 March 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

5 Wyre Code of Conduct Review

The Monitoring Officer referred to the recent review of the Council's Code of

Conduct, which had been discussed at length at the last meeting of the Committee (minute 18). She said that she did not intend to repeat that discussion, but just wanted to draw the attention of new members to the proposed changes. The intention of the review had been to simplify the Code, improve clarity and to make it less open to interpretation. The Committee's recommended revisions to code were to be submitted to the Council meeting in July for approval. Once the revised Code had been ratified, any complaints received thereafter would be assessed using the revised code.

Agreed that the current position be noted.

6 Current Complaints: Summary

The Monitoring Officer submitted a schedule summarising complaints of alleged breaches of the Council's code of conduct which were currently being processed or which had been completed since the last meeting of the Committee.

The Monitoring Officer explained, for the benefit of new members, that neither the names of complainants nor the councillors who were the subject of complaints, were revealed at this stage of the process. If, following initial consideration by the Monitoring Officer and one of the Independent Persons appointed by the Council for this purpose, a complaint was unresolved it would be submitted to the Standards Committee for a hearing. If a hearing was held the identity of the councillor alleged to have breached the code and, in most cases, the full details of the complaint, would be in the public domain. It was important that, until that stage in the process was reached, such details remained confidential. It was also important that the members of the Standards Committee were not put in a position where they might be perceived to be pre-determining a case.

She provided further information on each of the complaints referred to in the schedule, as follows:

Ref 2019/01 & 2019/02

Although these were separate complaints they were closely linked and were essentially about the same core issue. The first was about a particular parish/town councillor, the second was against the council as a whole and how they dealt with that issue, and in particular the councillor who was the subject of the first complaint. After the complaint had been received the councillor in question had resigned, although the Monitoring Officer considered this to be coincidental, rather than a consequence of the complaint. However, on the basis that the councillor had resigned, the complaint could not be pursued. With regards to the complaint against the whole Parish/Town Council it would be unusual to hold an entire council responsible for the action of one of its councillors and therefore that complaint would not be pursued either.

Ref 2019/03

The substance of this complaint was that the subject member had given the impression that they represented a particular organisation. The Monitoring Officer had discussed the complaint with the Independent person and it had been felt that the initial tests for an investigation had not been satisfied. It had therefore been concluded that the complaint would not be not be pursued.

Ref 2019/04

A similar complaint had been made previously about this councillor and the current complaint would normally have been pursued. However, it had been known at the time the complaint was made that the councillor in question was not standing in the May election. A decision had therefore been taken not to pursue this complaint.

Ref 2019/05

The incident referred to in this case had taken place at the count for the recent local elections. The complaint had been logged but, before any action had been taken, the complainant had advised the Monitoring Officer that the subject member had apologised at another meeting and therefore they had decided to withdraw the complaint.

Ref 2019/06

In this case, the subject member had made a comment on a social media newsletter about a member of the public, who then submitted a complaint. However, the comment which had been objected to had since since been removed from the site and, as it was no longer visible, the complaint had been withdrawn.

Ref 2019/07

The Monitoring Officer said that the note on the schedule about this complaint should state that the complainants and subject member would be (rather than had been) informed of the conclusion reached. She said that there was comprehensive video evidence of the incident in question. She had initially been inclined to seek further information but, having viewed the video and following a conversation with the Independent Person earlier this week, they had considered that the video was sufficient to enable a conclusion to be reached. The complainants and subject member would therefore now be notified accordingly.

Ref 2019/08 & 2019/09 (not 2019/10 as mistakenly stated on the schedule)

These complaints were very much interlinked and, following a meeting with the Independent Person this week, were being dealt with simultaneously. The investigation was in its early stages but, it was possible that a number of people would need to be interviewed and it was is likely to be complicated. An update would be submitted to the next meeting of the committee.

Agreed that the summary of complaints submitted by the Monitoring Officer

and her verbal report on each of the complaints referred to be noted.

7 Date of next Meeting

Noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Committee was scheduled to be held at 6pm on 7 November 2019.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and finished at 6.40 pm.

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