
GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Committee Room, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 30 October 2019 from 5.00pm - 6.10pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock (Vice-Chairman), Mike Dendor, Angela Harrison, Alan Horton, Denise Knights, Richard Palmer, Roger Truelove (Chairman), Mike Whiting and Corrie Woodford.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby, David Clifford and Robin Harris.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Steve Davey.

320 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

321 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 June 2019 (Minute Nos. 41 – 44) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

322 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

323 UPDATED MEDIA GUIDANCE

The Monitoring Officer advised that the proposed guidance had been included in the induction pack for Members, and that it differed from the existing constitutional guidance primarily in that it included an important section on social media. He advised that the paragraph in bold at the top of page 12 should be removed.

A discussion ensued which centred on the following themes:

- The guidance was useful but questioned whether it should be included in the constitution;
- the distinction between acting in a personal capacity and acting as a member;
- the lack of sanctions available to the Council's Standards Committee to take action for inappropriate comments on social media;
- that there were already standards in place in terms of the Code of Conduct (Nolan Principles) which all Members signed up to; and
- there was also other guidance available on this topic from the Local Government Association and in local political party rules, and reference was also made to legislation such as libel laws.

The Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer drew attention to the recommendations from the Committee on Standards in Public Life which

recommended legislative action to create a presumption that a councillor was always acting in that capacity, but this was not within current legislation.

A suggestion was made that the content could be considered further by the Member Development Working Group for inclusion in the training package.

Resolved:

(1) That updated guidance be issued to Members but not included in the constitution.

324 AMENDMENTS TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES ON MOTIONS

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report which suggested improvements to the wording of Council Procedure Rule 15 on motions. The Monitoring Officer outlined the intention of the proposed changes which was to ensure that decisions and policy were not made without proper consideration and were evidence based, and so to make it clear that a motion could signal a policy intention which would require further consideration by the Cabinet or a committee.

Members considered the revised wording and whilst they agreed with the principle and intention, they asked for the wording to be updated to make it more simple. It was suggested that the Mayor could announce at the end of a positive vote on a motion that it would be referred to 'X' for further consideration.

During the debate it was suggested that there should be specific rules on motions for the Planning Committee, and it was noted that a correction was needed to reflect he/she. Another member suggested that once a motion was moved it belonged to the council, and also questioned what would happen if the Mayor and Monitoring Officer did not agree on the Monitoring Officer's intention to reject a motion.

Resolved:

(1) That the Monitoring Officer reviews the wording to take account of the feedback from the Committee.

325 REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND PLACES - TEYNHAM AND LYNSTED WARD

The Committee considered the report to create an additional polling district to make voting arrangements more convenient for voters living in the Great Easthall estate who were within the boundary of the Teynham and Lynsted borough ward and Tonge Parish Council.

In response to a question about timing, the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager advised that it was unlikely that the proposed change could be implemented in time for the General Election on 12 December 2019.

Recommended:

(1) That the addition of a polling district and place in Teynham and Lynsted ward, for the voters who live in the Great Easthall estate, be agreed.

326 DISCLOSURE OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY FOR MEMBERS

The Committee considered the report regarding the proposal to introduce a requirement for members to register gifts and hospitality, which would be considered further by the Standards Committee prior to a decision being made by full Council.

Resolved:

(1) That the Committee supports the proposals set out in the report which will be considered further by the Standards Committee.

327 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY TRAINING - DISCUSSION PAPER

The Committee discussed the paper on options available to members to implement compulsory training for all members on equality and diversity, including unconscious bias.

The following sets out the key points from the discussion:

- That the training should be delivered as part of training on the Code of Conduct (Nolan Principles);
- there should be no connection between equality and diversity training and committee places;
- it was suggested that there should be a caveat that a member does not have to attend if they can evidence that they have completed the training elsewhere;
- it was suggested that consideration should be given as to whether councillors should have mandatory DBS checks;
- officers were asked whether any research had been undertaken as to what other authorities did or if the Local Government Association had any guidance on this subject;
- members should be 'strongly recommended' to keep up-to-date with this training and this could be enforced through group leaders;
- options for on-line training (ELMS) were available and this should be offered to members, which would make training more accessible;
- examples were given by members in their professions of requirements to undertake regular training; and
- it was suggested that the annual governance report to the Standards Committee should set out attendance statistics for training for each individual member training.

Chairman

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All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel