

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL  
STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING

Town Hall - Bridge Street, Bideford, EX39 2HS

Wednesday, 20 November 2019 - 10.00 am

PRESENT                      Councillor N Laws (Chair)  
                                    Councillors L Ford, C Hawkins and T Inch

Mr R Clark                    - Parish Representative  
Mr H Martin                  - Parish Representative  
Mr M Rawle                   - Independent Person

ALSO PRESENT              S Dorey                        - Senior Solicitor  
                                    M Richards                  - Democratic Services Officer

19.     APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Brown and Councillor Brenton.

20.     MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 7 AUGUST.

It was proposed by Councillor Hawkins, seconded by Councillor Laws and –

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 August be agreed and signed as a correct record.

(Vote: For 2, Abstentions 2)

21.     DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were reminded that declarations of interest should be made as and when the specific agenda item to which they related was under discussion.

22.     AGREEMENT OF AGENDA BETWEEN PARTS I AND II (IF APPLICABLE)

It was proposed, seconded and -

Resolved:

That the agenda, as circulated, be agreed.

(Vote: For - unanimous)

23. URGENT MATTERS OF INFORMATION TO BE BROUGHT FORWARD WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR AND THE COMMITTEE

The Chair welcomed Councillor Ford to the Committee.

24. REVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS

The Chair commented that a review of social media guidance had been much needed and that the document laid out the guidelines in very simple terms.

Members discussed the benefits and dangers of social media, also acknowledging the importance of issuing guidelines. It was agreed that the advice given in the draft document was excellent.

It was proposed by Councillor Laws, seconded by Councillor Inch and –

Resolved:

That the guidelines be adopted.

(Vote: For – unanimous)

Mr Clark asked to have recorded that the document was very well written and that thanks be extended to the author.

25. REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS FLOWCHART

Mr Clark spoke briefly about how the flowchart had come into being. The original flowchart had put the onus on the Monitoring Officer to whip Members into good behaviour, rather than Members wanting to behave well. There were elements of the old flowchart which had left officers exposed and it was for the Standards Committee to drive forward the way in which Members behaved. It was better if hearings could be avoided and a resolution be found through mediation.

Mr Clark discussed the protocol and highlighted areas where he thought things needed to be sharpened up:

- Failure to register disclosable pecuniary interests is a criminal offence and a matter for the police. This had been reflected in the new flowchart by police involvement being engaged much earlier in the process.
- The revised flowchart offered the opportunity for mediation.

The Senior Solicitor welcomed the Committee's comments, adding that it was important for Members to be involved in drawing up procedures.

The Chair thanked Mr Clark for the work he had put in to revising the flowchart.

A question was raised about the composition of the hearing panel and the Senior Solicitor responded that, under the current terms of reference, all Members of the

Standards Committee sit on hearing panels. She clarified that there was no right of appeal following a hearing. Addressing concerns about neutrality of the panel, she advised that the Independent Person is always consulted on receipt of any complaint.

The hearing procedure will be brought for review at the next meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Inch, Seconded by Councillor Ford and –

Resolved:

That the revised flowchart be adopted.

(Vote: For – unanimous)

26. FORWARD PLAN

Mr Clark informed that meeting that, due to a change in his personal circumstances, he will, in the near future, be stepping down from the Committee.

The Chair expressed sadness at this news and thanked Mr Clark for his contributions.

Items to be added to the Forward Plan:

- Review of Hearing Procedure
- Review of Complaints Form

The Senior Solicitor told Members that the Government had been reviewing the current Code of Conduct.

— Any Members interested in reading the report should contact the Senior Solicitor.

— A draft Code of Conduct will be published in 2020

27. EXCLUSION OF MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

It was proposed by Councillor Inch, seconded by Councillor Ford and –

Resolved:

That under Section 100(a)(4) of the Local Government Act (as amended) the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business because of the likely disclosure of exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 and Paragraph 10 of Part 2 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

(Vote: For – Unanimous)

28. PART II (CLOSED SESSION)

There were no complaint updates, however the Senior Solicitor invited Members to discuss the working relation between Officers and Members. She sought input on the way forward and asked Members for their views on how communication should be handled.

The Chair briefed the Committee on a forthcoming training opportunity for Members which will cover the role, responsibilities and guidelines for negotiating with officers. The training will be delivered by an independent, professional person and will be for Members only.

Event details:           9 January 2020  
                                  10.30 – 12.30, with lunch and afternoon session as  
                                  required  
                                  Caddstown

It was proposed by Councillor Inch, seconded by Councillor Ford and –

Resolved:

That the press and public be readmitted.

(Vote: For - unanimous)

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and closed at 11.01 am.

Chair:

Date: