

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in the Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 10 September 2015.

PRESENT: Mr A Hansard - Chairman
Councillors K M Baker, Mrs B E Boddington, M F Shellens and J E White

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Mrs L A Duffy, D A Giles and R Harrison

21. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25th June 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

22. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

23. THE CODE OF CONDUCT AND THE REGISTER OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

By means of a report by the Members' Support Assistant (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee was updated on the adoption of a Code of Conduct by Town and Parish Councils and on the receipt and publication of register of interests forms on behalf of District and Town and Parish Councillors. Members were reminded that the Monitoring Officer had a duty to establish and maintain a register of disclosable pecuniary interests. They noted that all of the 71 Town and Parish Councils had adopted a Code of Conduct, with 55 based on that adopted by the District Council, 12 had opted for the Code promoted by the National Association of Local Councils and the remaining four Councils had adopted their own version of the Code.

Members were then informed that, of the 71 Town and Parish Councils, 60 had their full Register published, which comprised the Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI) forms of all Councillors. Clerks from the remaining 11 Parish Councils had been reminded to send in outstanding DPI forms as soon as possible.

In terms of individual DPIs, 586 of a total of 650 had been received from Parish Councillors, 26 were outstanding and 38 were vacancies. The forms of all District Councillors had been published.

The Committee considered how to ensure the outstanding DPIs were received. Although the Monitoring Officer had no enforcement powers, owing to the legal nature of the duty to publish DPIs, it was felt that primary responsibility should remain with the Monitoring

Officer, with support from relevant Ward Members.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

24. COMPLAINTS

The Committee received and noted a report by the Policy, Performance and Transformation Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on complaints submitted to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) in 2013/14 and 2014/15.

The Committee was informed that in 2013/14, of the 15 complaints that were the subject of investigations by the LGO, three were upheld. Brief explanations of the three cases were received. No complaints were upheld in 2014/15.

With regard to internal complaints handling, the Committee was acquainted with trends over the last six years. There had been a reduction in the number of complaints investigated in the period but the significant decline in complaints in the last year suggested there had been under-reporting. For this reason and because a review was now due, a revised policy and internal guidance would be submitted to the Committee for approval in the autumn.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

25. ELECTORAL BOUNDARY REVIEW

The Committee gave consideration to a report by the Managing Director (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) process for the electoral review of Huntingdonshire. The first phase of the review was for the Council to produce a submission to the LGBCE, which provided a rationale, backed up with evidence, for a proposed Council size. The timescale for completion of this work was very short, so a working group comprising representatives from political groups had been convened to make a recommendation on the number of councillors the Council needed.

The Committee reviewed the detailed submission, which had been prepared to support the retention of 52 Members. Subject to strengthening the Council's case through the inclusion of sources for the figures provided, the Committee endorsed the contents of the submission on Council size.

Members noted that the Committee would continue to be involved in the remaining stages of the review.

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended to approve the Huntingdonshire District Council submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on Council

size.

26. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on 3rd December 2015 at 4.00pm in the Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon.

Chairman