

STANDARDS AND PERSONNEL APPEALS COMMITTEE

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Monday, 16th December, 2024 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Lee Waters in the Chair;
Councillors Oliver Hay and Phil Rostance.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Kier Barsby, Paul Grafton and Dave Shaw.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Ruth Dennis and Shane Wright.

In Attendance: Parish Councillor David Martin (Selston Parish Council).

SP.7 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

SP.8 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 July 2024, be received and approved as a correct record.

SP.9 Quarterly Ethical Governance Update

The Executive Director for Governance (and Monitoring Officer) presented the report and advised Members that five new complaints had been received by the Authority during the period July to September 2024. Three of the complaints had been submitted by members of the public, with one being dismissed as being outside of the Code of Conduct. The remaining two complaints had been submitted by a Councillor against another Councillor.

Four complaints remained ongoing with one being referred to an external investigator. Two had been reviewed and determined not to be a breach and two had been dismissed at the initial stages, one for not being in the public interest and another for being outside of the scope of the Code of Conduct.

Members were also asked to note that no Gifts and Hospitality declarations had been made between July to September 2024.

On completion of the update, the Executive Director for Governance (and Monitoring Officer) took the opportunity to update Members in respect of the recently released English Devolution White Paper. The White Paper had set out the Government's plans to widen and deepen devolution across England and provide mayors with unprecedented powers.

It also outlined how Government was intending to introduce a more robust and effective Standards regime to endeavour to improve Member behaviour and accountability, whilst raising standards of working in the future. Consultation would be coming out in the coming months to seek Members views, and the Local Government Association was due to meet with Monitoring Officers in January 2025 to consider the proposals.

A mandatory Members Code of Conduct was proposed to mandate for higher standards of behaviour including tough sanctions for any breaches of the Code in respect of discrimination, bullying and abuse of social media platforms. It was also intended to reintroduce a Standards National Body to investigate complaints and hear appeals, and to potentially provide sanctions to enable Council's to suspend or disqualify Members and withhold allowances for serious (and repeat) breaches of the Code.

It was also anticipated that going forward, Member would not be required to have their home addresses published as part of their Register of Interest declarations.

RESOLVED

that the updated position regarding Member Complaints and Gifts and Hospitality declarations (up to the end of September 2024) and initial thoughts around the content of the recently released English Devolution White Paper, be received and duly noted.

SP.10 Consultation on Remote Attendance

The Council's Service Manager for Governance presented the report and asked Committee to consider providing a response to the consultation published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG), in relation to remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings.

On 24 October 2024 the MHCLG launched an open consultation seeking feedback from a wide range of stakeholders regarding remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings. The Government wished to obtain views in relation to their intended introduction of powers for local authority members, to enable them to seek a dispensation to attend formal council meetings remotely and to vote by proxy under certain circumstances.

The open consultation consisted of 13 questions and Members were requested to consider each one in turn and provide responses/feedback as required.

The general responses/feedback received were as follows:

- Agreement in principle to remote attendance
- There should be specific limitations on remote attendance for certain committees, to be determined by the Council itself
- Most Members would appreciate, and take advantage of, being able to attend some meetings remotely
- Council should have the flexibility to conduct fully remote meetings under special circumstances
- Standard constitutional arrangements should be in place, and followed, for hybrid and fully remote meetings
- The ability to hold hybrid meetings is a positive measure and could increase the diversity of people willing to stand for election
- Hybrid meetings would support individuals with protected characteristics, disabilities or caring responsibilities
- Unsure as to the benefits of proxy voting at this present time (too many variables for differing types of committees).

RESOLVED

that the responses proffered by Members (in relation to the questions provided as part of the consultation questionnaire), be amalgamated to form the Committee's collective response to the MHCLG open consultation in relation to remote attendance, hybrid meetings, and proxy voting at local authority meetings.

The meeting closed at 8.03 pm

Chairman.