

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting of the Standards Committee of South Norfolk District Council held on 28 September 2022 at 10am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: K Mason Billig (Chairman), S Blundell and S Ridley

Apologies for Absence: Councillor: J Easter and J Wilby

Officers in Attendance: The Chief of Staff and Monitoring Officer (E Hodds), the Governance Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer (L Mockford), the Senior Governance Officer (E Goddard) and the Democratic Service Officer (L Arthurton)

7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr J Easter and Cllr J Wilby.

8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

9 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on Friday 16 December 2016 were confirmed as a correct record.

10 THE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE AND THE MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

Members considered the report of the Monitoring Officer which asked members to consider the Committee on Standards in Public Life's (CSPL) fifteen best practice recommendations. The Report also requested the Committee consider the Local Government Association's (LGA) Model Code of Conduct, and agree that it be consulted on, in whole or with local amendments.

Members noted that training sessions with Parish and Town Councils had taken place and some parish and town councils had already adopted the LGA's Model Code of Conduct. Officers further highlighted that the LGA's Model Code was more prescriptive than the current SNC code and also contained in-depth details on what was expected by members, including:

- Clarity on respect, including examples of disrespectful behaviour
- Explicit references to bullying, harassment, and discrimination, with examples included
- Confidentiality and access to information
- Incorporation of advances in technology, social media and changes in Government legislation

Discussion turned to the registration and declaration of interests, where members of the Committee were informed that for:

- **Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)**, there were no changes from the current Code of Conduct
- **Other Registrable Interests (ORI)**, 'any unpaid directorships' had been included in the Model Code as well as clarifications on the disclosure of interests at meetings which directly related to the financial interest or well-being of an ORI. Example of which had been included in appendix B of the Model Code.
- **Non-Registrable Interests (NRI)**, the Model Code outlined that where a matter arose in a meeting which directly related to a member's financial interest or well-being that was not a DPI, or a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate, it must be disclosed by the member at the meeting.

Further clarification was given regarding interests relating to a Councillor's spouse. The Governance Manager explained that they would still need to be registered as pecuniary interests but would not be required to be registered as 'other' interests.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed to members that, if approved by the Committee, the Model Code of Conduct would go out to consultation with District, Town and Parish Councillors for six weeks. Any responses received would then be analysed and implemented if needed. Following this, the Council would look at implementing the new Code of Conduct in May 2023, which would coincide with the District Elections.

Several members of the Committee supported the recommendations adding that the proposals followed best practice and used a common-sense approach to matters. The Chairman agreed and added that the inclusion of the bullying and harassment section was a good addition and would support members when carrying out their role within the Community.

Concerning the Gifts and Hospitality section of the Model Code, Officers explained that this section would be assessed further as part of the consultation for both members and officers. Quarterly reporting on gifts and hospitality would also enable further transparency.

Conversation turned to best practice regarding complaints received from Parish Council Clerks about Members of the Council. Officers confirmed that primarily the complaint should come through the Chairman, but this should not deter others from raising concerns if required.

One member queried when a councillor would be able to speak on an item at a Parish Council meeting if a relevant declaration was made that only permitted them to speak when public speaking was also allowed. It was confirmed that they would be able to speak if the public were able to, but could not vote on nor discuss the item. Members noted that a Chairman could suspend standing orders if required or dispensations could be considered.

It was then;

RESOLVED

To

1. Agree that the Local Government Association's (LGA) Model Code of Conduct be consulted on, in whole, and that the results of the consultation be considered by the Standards Committee before a final code of conduct was recommended to Full Council.
2. Note the best practice recommendations from the Local Ethical Standards to ensure that these are reflected in the code or working practices in whole or with local amendments.

11 CIVILITY IN PUBLIC LIFE

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report which presented the LGA's report and work programme on civility in public life. Members noted that this was an update to a report which went to Council earlier in the year. When introducing the report, the Monitoring Officer confirmed and reassured the Committee that there had been no incidents that members of the Council had felt necessary to raise with her.

Following a question on how members should report incidents, officers confirmed that any incidents should be reported to the proper officer. Members should also document all incidents which occur. The Monitoring

Officer confirmed that she would resend the survey from earlier in the year to all members for any additional feedback.

In response to a question on whether the Council maintained a log of incidents and individuals, officers explained that this data was held and could be accessed if the information was relevant to their role/area. Any concerns or questions relating to the above should go through to the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families and his team. The Monitoring Officer added that if any changes occurred the local member/s would be made aware.

Discussion turned to Councillors visiting residents within their areas and the procedures in place to protect members. One member expressed concern over going to residents' houses alone and suggested that any members needing to visit should do so with a colleague. Officers confirmed that this would need to follow any Data Protection laws and be mindful of lone working principles.

One member suggested that a non-disclosure form could be used if an additional person was required for the meeting. Officers reinforced to members that the resident should always be informed in advance if an additional person was attending. The Monitoring Officer reassured members that further training would be provided in this area. It was then;

RESOLVED

To

1. Receive the report and note the current work of the LGA, promoting civility in public life and supporting the well-being of elected members.
- and;
2. Confirm the adoption of a member protocol and notes any further action required.

(The meeting concluded at 10:28am)

Chairman