

**MINUTES of
JOINT STANDARDS COMMITTEE (SPECIAL MEETING)
18 DECEMBER 2015 (AT 3PM)**

PRESENT

Chairman	Cllr Rev. A E J Shrimpton
Vice-Chairman	Cllr M R Pearlman
Councillors	Mrs B F Acevedo, R G Boyce MBE, CC, I E Dobson, Ledger and Nunn
Parish/Town Councillors	Councillors B Ledger and S Nunn
In attendance	Mr N V Hodson (Independent Person)

716. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

717. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 30 July 2015 be approved and confirmed.

718. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

Although there were no actual disclosable interests declared, all Members indicated that they knew the Councillor the subject of the report under agenda item 6.

At this point the Chairman welcomed Councillors Ledger and Nunn as members of the Committee.

719. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS - REMUNERATION

The Committee considered the report of the Monitoring Officer on the review of arrangements for the remuneration of the Independent Person(s).

The report set out the background to the appointment of Independent Person(s) to assist the Council in relation to breaches of the Councillor Code of Conduct and the adopted complaints process in that respect. It also detailed the arrangements made for the initial appointments of an Independent Person and two deputies, and the extension of their

terms of office to February 2016. The Committee was authorised to make arrangements for future appointments for Council approval, and to deal with matters of remuneration. The Committee was therefore requested to review remuneration in connection with the recruitment process to be implemented shortly.

The Chairman introduced Mr N V Hodson, the current Independent Person, who was present at the meeting.

The Committee was advised of the nature of the engagement of the Independent Person in relation to the several and increasing number of conduct complaints received by the Monitoring Officer.

While Members were minded to pursue re-appointment of the existing persons if they were willing to continue, the Monitoring Officer advised that in the interests of fairness, openness and transparency it would be preferable to review the situation through a recruitment process.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed that if the existing persons were willing to continue to serve that their terms of office be extended by a further year and that a fresh recruitment process be begun in September 2016.

RESOLVED

- (i) that the payment to the Independent Person of an allowance inclusive of expenses in the sum of £500 per annum to be paid in half yearly instalments, and that reserve Independent Persons be reimbursed mileage on the basis of claims received; and

RECOMMENDED

- (ii) that the Council agrees to the extension of the terms of office of the Independent Person(s) to 8 February 2017, provided that they are willing to continue to serve.

720. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and that this satisfies the public interest test.

721. ALLEGATION OF MISCONDUCT 5 /2015

The Chairman announced that he would be vacating the meeting on advice from the Monitoring Officer that he had a prejudicial interest in this matter. He then left the meeting and did not return.

IN THE CHAIR : COUNCILLOR M R PEARLMAN (VICE-CHAIRMAN)

The Committee considered the report of the Monitoring Officer on whether a District Councillor named in the report had failed to comply with the Council's Code of Conduct.

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that it was not required to consider the substantive matter of the conduct complaint, but rather the process around it. She then informed the Committee of her advice to Councillor Shrimpton given the clear evidence of his prior involvement in and conversations on the substantive allegation. She said that given the nature of these matters it was vital that the Monitoring Officer remained free to report independently to the Committee, and that it was not the role of the Chairman of the Committee to undertake any prior preparatory or investigatory work by himself. She had therefore advised the Chairman to cease any involvement in the matter in order to safeguard the integrity of the Committee in the matters it was charged to deal with.

The report set out the nature of the complaint against the Councillor concerned, but it was noted that the Monitoring Officer had been unable to fulfil stage 1 of the Council's complaints process. The matter had therefore been referred to the Committee to make an assessment of the allegation and decide in accordance with stage 2 of the complaints process whether to refer the matter for investigation or to take no further action.

It was noted that the Monitoring Officer had discussed the allegation with the Independent Person, Mr N V Hodson, who was then asked to give the Committee the benefit of his views.

Arising from the Committee's discussion, it was noted that the Code of Conduct no longer contained any reference to 'disrepute'. Although this might be felt to be a subjective conclusion, it was something to which poor or unprofessional behaviour on the part of a Councillor could lead. It was agreed that the Council should be recommended to undertake a full review of its Code of Conduct.

RESOLVED

- (i) that the allegation of misconduct the subject of this report be referred for further investigation under stage 2 of the Council's complaints process.

RECOMMENDED

- (ii) that the Council reviews the Councillor Code of Conduct in its entirety and considers the possible re-introduction of a provision that refers to the bringing of the Council into disrepute.

There being no further items of business the Chairman closed the meeting at 3.57 pm

REV. A E J SHRIMPTON
CHAIRMAN

(a)
(b)