



Rutland County Council

Catmose Oakham Rutland LE15 6HP.
Telephone 01572 722577 Facsimile 01572 75307

Minutes of the **MEETING of the CONDUCT COMMITTEE** held in the Via Zoom:
<https://zoom.us/j/97021546307> on Wednesday, 23rd September, 2020 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Mr O Hemsley Mr I Razzell
Mr N Woodley Mrs S Webb

ABSENT: Mrs L Stephenson Mr A Brown

OFFICERS PRESENT: Mr P Horsfield Monitoring Officer

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms S Harvey
Ms Jones (substitute for Mr A Brown)

1 **APOLOGIES**

An apology was received by Councillor A Brown who was substituted by Councillor Jones.

2 **APPOINTMENT OF VICE- CHAIRMAN**

Councillor Hemsley proposed Cllr A Brown as Vice Chair and seconded by Cllr Razzell.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor A Brown be appointed as Vice Chair of the Conduct Committee.

3 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous Conduct Committee held on 3 September 2019, were confirmed.

4 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interests.

5 **PETITIONS, DEPUTATION AND QUESTIONS**

There were none.

6 **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS**

There were none.

7 COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE - REVIEW OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ETHICAL STANDARDS

Councillor Hemsley, introduced the report and explained that the recommendations were for noting. He referred to recommendation 3 and requested an amendment that a further meeting be called when the Council had received the final version of the code or the Government response to the CSPL.

The Monitoring Officer explained that in January 2019 the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) published a report setting out its findings from a review of Local Government Ethical Standards which it had undertaken over the preceding 12 months. The LGA have then also consulted on a draft Model Code of Conduct. It was explained that there was currently no response to the consultation and due to the ongoing Covid pandemic, it was unlikely that a response would be forthcoming in the near future.

Concern was raised about the feedback from the LGA of *'the need to be able to prevent councillors from attending council offices (for the most prolific or serious offenders) and to withdraw facilities which have been misused in breach of the code (i.e. council technology)'* as this could potentially prevent an elected member from performing their elected duties and being open to interpretation could be misused by stifling debate and potentially muting an elected member(s).

The Monitoring Officer explained that emails/technology would only be withdrawn when there was evidence of bullying and harassment through such means. The Committee discussed whether making the rules too prescriptive and to remove interpretation as there may be instance where this would be necessary to gain more evidence and to restrict it would hinder such opportunities.

In response to questions asked, the Monitoring Officer explained that with regards to Social Media, if a member was considered not to be acting in their official capacity as a councillor, they were not covered by the Code of Conduct. He commented that there needed to be a balance between access with a clear distinction in what capacity they are engaging in social media activities.

The Chair, with the agreement of the Committee, invited Councillor Harvey –a non-Committee Member to speak. She requested that with changes to working practices, specifically with the increased number of online meetings being held, that an easy to follow guide to online etiquette be produced to assist Councillors. She stated that members of the public now being able to participate in meetings would allow people with differing levels of experience and technology to participate. Therefore, she considered essential that part of the etiquette guide should include 'patience' and 'empathy' for those affected by poor quality broadband or an unfamiliarity with technology which was fully supported by the Committee. In response the Monitoring Officer confirmed that this would be looked at a guide would be produced as agreed.

The Monitoring Officer explained that with regards to Parish Council complaints and Code of Conduct matters, there are a minority of cases that cause disproportion amount of work when it was considered a necessity for intervention. It was noted that the Council would ordinarily try to informally advise Parish and Town Councils working closely with LRALC to ensure that advice is sought and given as soon as possible. It was considered progress could be made with the involvement of the Parish Council Forum by helping bridge relations between the County and the Parishes.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the position in respect of report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, (CSPL), arising from its review of the effectiveness of the current arrangements for ethical standards amongst councillors in English local authorities. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-governmentethical-standards-report>) be noted.
- ii) That the Draft Code of Conduct provided by the LGA. <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/LGA%20Model%20Member%20Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf> be noted.
- iii) Request a further meeting of this Committee once the LGA have published a final version of the Model Code OR the Government has provided their response to the CSPL report.

8 NOTICES OF MOTION

There were none.

9 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent items to be considered.

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The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 7.29pm.

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