

Standards Committee
10 February 2020

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL STANDARDS COMMITTEE held on Monday 10 February 2020 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors T.Kingsbury (Chairman)
L.Brandon, A.Chesterman, P.Zukowskyj and B.Morris

ALSO Parish B. Morris
PRESENT: Councillor

OFFICIALS Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) (N. Long)
PRESENT: Head of Law and Administration (M. Martinus)
Policy and Communications Manager (T. Burn)
Principal Governance Officer (A. Marston)

13. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor S. Thusu.

14. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. REVIEW OF MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT AND DRAFT SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL

The report of the Monitoring Officer informed the committee that the revised Code of Conduct had been considered by the Constitution Review Group in October 2019. Standards Committee is tasked with matters relating to code of conduct and as such the committee was asked to review the amended document (and additional Social Media Protocol) and then to recommend to Council for adoption.

The committee was informed that the main changes to the Code of Conduct agreed by the Constitution Review Group had come about through the Peer Challenge Review in 2019 to align the code with the council's #OneTeam behaviours and values. The opportunity had also been taken to review the financial threshold for gifts and hospitality to bring it in line with best practice recommended by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in their report to Government on 'Local Government Ethical Standards'.

The draft Social Media Protocol had been prepared by an external consultant who is experienced in drafting a number of these protocols for other councils. Officers advised the committee that it is felt to be thorough and consistent with what other authorities produce. A minor amendment had been suggested

Standards Committee
10 February 2020

when the protocol was considered by the Constitution Review Group in November 2019 which was to amend paragraph 3a)(x) to replace the word *negative* with *inflammatory* so the paragraph will read:

Treat others with respect and not use social media to attack, insult, abuse, defame or otherwise make inflammatory, offensive or discriminatory comments about residents, council staff and services, other councillors and/or organisations.

A question was raised in respect of the application of the code during site visits; specifically around how an interest would be declared. Advice was given by officers that if an interest is known in advance of the site visit a substitute should be arranged. If an interest becomes apparent during a site visit then this would need to be declared at any subsequent meeting.

Members asked for the Social Media Protocol to be further amended to resolve minor spelling and grammar issues.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the amendments as outlined above, the report of the Monitoring Officer be approved and the revised Code of Conduct and new Social Media Protocol for members be referred to the Council with a recommendation for adoption.

16. SURVEILLANCE UPDATE

Verbal report from the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) which provided an update on the Council's use of surveillance powers.

Members were informed that the annual statistics had been submitted to the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office. The council has not granted, or sought to grant, any authorisations during the last reporting period.

Following advice from the Investigatory Powers Commissioner after the last inspection, a new training course is being rolled out. This focuses on surveillance activities using the online space and is mandatory for all staff with access to the internet as part of their roles. The aim of the course is to ensure staff are aware of the boundaries and potential risks of using the internet and social media to find out information about third parties.

The core, half day training course for staff who carry out investigations as part of their roles is still running and the staff induction has recently been updated to ensure key messages are communicated early.

Members were advised of new lone worker protection devices for staff that were being purchased which include the ability to contact a remote monitoring centre when activated. Conversations and background noises will be able to be heard and recorded with the aim that if an officer is in need of assistance this can be immediately arranged.

Standards Committee
10 February 2020

A section was proposed to be added to the RIPA policy explaining the use of these devices by the council.

Staff protection devices

The council acknowledges and takes seriously its health and safety duties as an employer.

The council accepts that it has a duty to ensure staff safety so far as is reasonably practicable and in common with other public sector organisations, will use technology to help fulfil that duty.

From time to time, it may be appropriate for council officers to work alone away from the main office or to work at remote locations. This could include domestic properties. As part of our reasonable risk controls the council has out in place "lone worker protection devices" for use by staff working away from the office. These devices, when activated allow an officer to make contact with a remote monitoring centre who are able to listen in to conversations and background noises and if necessary instruct the emergency services to come the aid of an officer who is in need of assistance. Staff are trained in the use of these devices.

These devices are only to be activated when staff feel threatened and it may not be apparent to others present that a member of staff has activated such a device. The inclusion of this section in the RIPA policy is to place on record that the council has access to, and will use these devices to help ensure staff safety.

Further information on the devices will be brought to Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee when the next Health and Safety update is reported.

RESOLVED

The update was noted and the amendments to the RIPA policy approved.

Meeting ended at 8.00 pm