

Standards Committee  
11 February 2019

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL STANDARDS COMMITTEE held on Monday 11 February 2019 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors T.Kingsbury (Chairman)  
S.Markiewicz and S. Roberts

ALSO  
PRESENT: Councillor B. Morris

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance)  
(N. Long)  
Head of Law and Administration (M. Martinus)  
Principal Governance Officer (I. Colyer)  
Governance Services Officer (G. Paddan)

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**COUNCILLOR T KINGSBURY WAS APPOINTED AS CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE FOR THE 2018/2019 MUNICIPAL YEAR AT THE COUNCIL MEETING ON 19 NOVEMBER 2018.**

32. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T. Jackson-Mynott and S. Thusu.

33. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

34. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 7

The Chairman agreed to accept the following item as urgent:

- Document headed 'Local Government Ethical Standards'

The reason for accepting this item as urgent was that the agenda had been published before the document had become available for circulation.

35. SURVEILLANCE UPDATE 2019

The Standards Committee received a report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance), which updated Members on the Council's

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policy and use of surveillance powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (as amended) (RIPA). Members were asked to note the use of surveillance powers and to agree the revised Policy in Appendix A.

Members considered the amendments proposed and were reminded that at the last meeting in September 2018, further papers had been published by the government that needed to be incorporated; hence the substantial number of amendments to the draft document.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- The Council's use of RIPA is minimal but a policy is required by law.
- The Officers explained that the Council may well be inspected within the next few months.
- The amended Policy would be tabled at the next Council meeting for adoption.
- The amendments to the Policy would have no adverse effects on operational matters.
- Noted that there has been no refusals by Magistrates to requests for surveillance.
- It was agreed that the words 'video tape' be replaced with 'digital media'.
- The following wording was agreed 'If a UAV is to be used for general purposes then whilst not needing a RIPA authorisation, permission from the relevant Portfolio Holder is required before the UAV is deployed' to be included under the heading 'Drones and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV)'.
- Agreed to change 3 years to 5 years for best practice.

RESOLVED

That the Committee note the use of surveillance powers, agree the revised policy in Appendix A and to recommend to Full Council that it be adopted.

### 36. UPDATE ON FRAUD ARRANGEMENTS

The Principal Governance Officer advised that this was his last meeting, as he would be retiring from the Council next month. The Committee was updated on the arrangements that have been agreed as part of the amendments to the current job description.

Members were advised that the Fraud Policy had been updated and that the new lead officer for fraud and SIAS was Head of Resources. There were some specific provisions made with the Housing Trust in terms of fraud arrangements.

A question was raised in respect of financial implications of fraud; unfortunately this information was not available.

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The Chairman together with the Committee thanked Ian Colyer, Principal Governance Officer for his support to the Committee and wished him well for his retirement.

RESOLVED

That the verbal report be noted.

37. SUCH OTHER BUSINESS AS, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, IS OF SUFFICIENT URGENCY TO WARRANT IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

The Committee received a copy of the document headed 'Local Government Ethical Standards' which was published last week. The document contained a number of recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, advisory committee to the Prime Minister, and identified best practice to improve ethical standards in local government. These included a number of changes to primary legislation, which would be subject to Parliamentary timetabling but also to secondary legislation and the Local Government Transparency Code.

The Head of Law and Administration briefly outlined the key recommendations proposed in the document. A discussion ensued on the requirement to attend formal induction training and the need to ensure that training is mandatory for Councillors.

It was noted that there has been some evidence that the current narrow scope of the code of conduct makes it difficult to effectively deal with some of the issues of poor behaviour and misunderstandings. Further consideration was given to the recommendation regarding the right of appeal for councillors; this would strengthen the role of the Independent Person.

RESOLVED

That the document be noted.

Meeting ended at 8.10 pm  
GP