

Meeting	Joint Standards Committee
Date	22 July 2020
Present	Councillors Douglas (Chair), Baker, Carr, Fisher, Rowley, Chambers (Parish Council Member), Rawlings (Parish Council Member) and David Laverick (Independent Member)
Apologies	Angharad Davies

40. Declarations of Interest

Members were asked to declare any personal interests not included on the Register of Interests, or any prejudicial interests or disclosable pecuniary interests, which they might have in respect of business on the agenda. No interests were declared.

41. Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved: That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of agenda item 8 (Monitoring Report on Complaints Received), on the grounds that it contains information which is likely to reveal the identity of individuals. This information is classed as exempt under Paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to information) (Variation) Order 2006.

42. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2020 be approved as a correct record, to be signed by the Chair at a later date.

43. Public Participation

It was reported that there had been one registration to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

Gwen Swinburn spoke of her concerns regarding the dismissal of a complaint against a Councillor in just nine days, without an explanation. Ms Swinburn also noted that her own complaint submitted over a week ago had not been acknowledged. Finally, the public participant noted the omission of items on the work plan that had been agreed at a previous meeting.

44. Urgent Business

There was no urgent business reported.

45. LGA Consultation on a Model Code of Conduct for Elected Members

The committee received a report introducing an LGA consultation on the model code of conduct for Elected Members.

Members highlighted the omission of repeat offers of gifts from the model code of conduct, noting that if gifts fell under the £25 limit, they could be accepted without the need to declare. Members also noted the importance of declaring which individual or organisation had offered the gift / hospitality.

Members noted the lack of reference to Parish Councils within the code of conduct and stated that it would be important for them to be included under the relevant authorities' code. The committee asked for this to be included in the response

In response to Member questions, the monitoring officer noted the need for further clarification on the wider definition of 'declaration of interests'. The committee agreed that the response to the consultation should seek clarification on this point.

Members reflected that the 'protected characteristics' no longer included marital status and asked for this to be included within the response. It was also noted that 'socio-economic equality' should be mentioned in the local code at a later date.

Members noted they were pleased with the inclusion of conduct on social media within the LGA's model code, but that more clarity on the definitions of public/private life would be welcomed.

Resolved: That the Monitoring Officer prepare a response to the consultation, taking into account the comments of the committee, that can be finalised by the Chair prior to being submitted.

Reason: To ensure that the points raised by the committee are heard by the Local Government Association in relation to the Model Code of Conduct.

46. Dispensation of the Six Month Rule for City of York Councillors and Attendance at Meetings

The committee received a report from the Monitoring Officer on the dispensation of the 'six month rule' in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Monitoring Officer explained that due to the coronavirus pandemic and resulting 'lockdown', there are some Members who, through no fault of their own, have not been able to attend a Council meeting during this period. The dispensation is requested so that those affected Members can avoid potential repercussions for not having attended a Council meeting.

Members did convey concern that the dispensation would allow Members to not attend meetings in protest against remote meetings in general.

Members noted that they would be happier with a fixed date being attached to the dispensation.

Resolved: That a dispensation is granted to all City of York Councillors who have been justifiably unable to attend a constitutionally prescribed meeting so as to ensure that they are exempt from the provisions of Section 85 Local Government Act 1972. This dispensation will expire on 31 December 2020.

Reason: A dispensation is required as it has not been possible to deliver the full suite of constitutionally prescribed meetings under the Remote Meetings Guidance.

47. Review of the Work Plan - 2020/21

The committee reviewed their work plan for the municipal year 2020/2021.

Members asked for the following outstanding items from the previous meeting of the committee be re-added to the committee's work plan for the September meeting:

- Report on how the JSC and CYC can better support parish councils in their work
- Planning and Pre-determination advice for City of York and Parish Councillors
- Update on Whistleblowing Policy
- Update on DBS procedures

Members asked for the following to be added the committee's work plan for a future date to be confirmed:

- Model Code of Conduct
- Member/Officer Protocol
- Member Development (inc. on reduction of complaints and use of social media)

Resolved: That the committee considers agenda items to be included in the work plan for the municipal year.

Reason: To ensure the committee regularly review items to be discussed.

48. Monitoring Report in Respect of Complaints Received

The Monitoring Officer presented a report to the committee outlining the position regarding ongoing complaints.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

Reason: To ensure that the committee is aware of current levels of activity.

Cllr Claire Douglas, Chair

[The meeting started at 1600 and finished at 1745].