

**CIVIC AFFAIRS**19 March 2014  
6.00pm - 7.27 pm

**Present:** Councillors Rosenstiel (Chair), Cantrill (Vice-Chair), Ashton, Benstead, Herbert and Pitt

**FOR ADOPTION BY THE COUNCIL****14/15/CIV Review of Standards Regime**

The committee received a report from the Head of Legal Services reviewing the Council's standards regime.

Code of Conduct

An amended version of the Cambridge City Council Code of Conduct was circulated for comment. This replaced the earlier "ten principles of public life" with the seven principles now advocated by the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The amended version also clarified points and corrected cross-references but did not make further substantive changes to the Code.

In response to members' questions the Head of Legal Services said the following:

- i. Agreed with Councillor Herbert that additional guidance for Councillors on potential 'danger zones' relating to the Code of Conduct may be beneficial. It was agreed that this would be included in the induction sessions for new Councillors. Existing Councillors would also be encouraged to attend for a refresher session.

The Chief Executive asked for views on the use of social media and if additional guidance for Councillors would be beneficial.

In response the committee made the following points:

- ii. Social media was a useful tool for engaging with the public and encouraging participation at meetings.
- iii. Raised concerns about inappropriate use of social media during meetings and the affect this may have on the debate in the Chamber.
- iv. There was an expectation from the public that Councillors use some form of social media and engage with residents via different mediums.

- v. If the Council filmed its meetings this may reduce the need for the use of social media during the debate.
- vi. The use of social media could be viewed differently depending on the type of meeting in which it was being used i.e. Council, Scrutiny or Regulatory.
- vii. Whilst strict rules for Councillors on the use of social media were not necessary, clearer guidance on the possible pitfalls would be beneficial.

The Chief Executive suggested that social media be covered as part of the 'danger zones' induction for Councillors. It was also suggested that good practice from the LGA Networked Councillor Programme could be shared with all Councillors.

### Procedure on complaints

In response to members' questions the Head of Legal Services said the following:

- i. In July 2012 Council agreed that the Standards Sub Committee would consist of two Liberal Democrat Councillors and two Labour Councillors. Membership did not have to be restricted to those sitting on the Civic Affairs Committee.
- ii. A meeting of a Sub Committee had not yet been required.
- iii. The Sub Committee hearing process would be agreed at its first meeting.
- iv. The Independent Person would have an input into any hearing of the Standards Sub Committee.
- v. A few complaints had been received from members of the public and, to date, two formal investigations had been undertaken. On neither occasion had a breach of the Code of Conduct been found.
- vi. Agreed that members of the Sub Committee would need to be carefully chosen to avoid close links with the member whose conduct was the subject of complaint.
- vii. Agreed that additional guidance for all Councillors on the process would be beneficial.

In response to member's questions the Independent Person said the following:

- i. The process was working well and a good dialogue had been established with the Head of Legal Services.
- ii. Promoting the Code of Conduct to new Councillors was important.
- iii. Would be happy to meet informally with Councillors prior to a future Civic Affairs Committee meeting.

## Dispensations

In response to member's questions the Head of Legal Services said the following:

- i. The Independent Persons would be consulted prior to any dispensation being granted.
- ii. The reasons for which a dispensation might be granted were included in the Localism Act and were very broad.

### **Resolved** (unanimously) to

- i. Extend a formal invitation to the Council's Independent Persons, appointed under the Localism Act 2011, to attend, and contribute to, its meetings.
- ii. Recommend that Council amends the Code of Conduct by incorporating the seven principles of public life set out in section 3 of the officer's report and the additional changes set out in the Council agenda