

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

JOINT STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Monday, 20th January, 2025

Present: Cllr D A S Davis (Chair), Cllr K Barton, Cllr M D Boughton (substitute), Cllr G C Bridge, Cllr J Clokey (substitute), Cllr M A Coffin (substitute), Cllr B A Parry, Cllr R V Roud, Cllr K B Tanner and Cllr C Williams (substitute).

Together with parish/town representatives Mr W Stead (Burham Parish Council), Mr N Newman (Ditton Parish Council), Mr O Baldock (Hadlow Parish Council), Mrs W Palmer (Platt Parish Council), Mr M Carboni (Plaxtol Parish Council) and Prof M McKinlay (Ryarsh Parish Council).

Cllr M Taylor* was also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(*participated via MS Teams)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs S Bell (Vice-Chair), Mrs T Dean, J R S Lark and M R Rhodes.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

ST 25/1 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Notification of substitute Members were recorded as set out below:

- Cllr Boughton substituted for Cllr Bell
- Cllr Clokey substituted for Cllr Dean
- Cllr Williams substituted for Cllr Lark
- Cllr Coffin substituted for Cllr Rhodes

In accordance with Council Procedure Rules 17.5 to 17.9 these Councillors had the same rights as the ordinary member of the committee for whom they were substituting.

ST 25/2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

ST 25/3 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Joint Standards Committee held on 5 June 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

DECISIONS TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED POWERS**ST 25/4 CONSULTATION - STRENGTHENING THE STANDARDS AND CONDUCT FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND**

The report of the Monitoring Officer presented the consultation on strengthening the standards and conduct framework, published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on 18 December 2024 (attached at Annex 1), together with a proposed response for approval by the Committee (attached at Annex 2).

The consultation sought views on introducing measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime in England and ensure consistency of approach amongst council's investigating serious breaches of their member codes of conduct, including the introduction of the power of suspension. Members discussed the proposed responses in detail and their comments were noted. In particular, Members raised concern in relation to Question 24, i.e. that a suspended councillor be banned from council premises and the use of council facilities withdrawn in cases where deemed appropriate, and suggested that this should not be applied to a member who was the subject of an interim suspension.

RESOLVED: That the Borough Council's response to the consultation, as set out in Annex 2, be approved subject to the comments made.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION**ST 25/5 COMPLAINTS UPDATE**

The Committee received an update on the complaints made to the Monitoring Officer that a Member may have failed to comply with their authority's code of conduct.

Details of the complaints received since the last meeting of the Joint Standards Committee were set out in Annex 1. Three complaints had been made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in relation to decisions reached by the Monitoring Officer. Two of these cases related to decisions made by the Monitoring Officer during 2024 with the third relating to a decision made during 2023. In all three cases, the Ombudsman had indicated that it would not investigate the complaints because there was insufficient evidence of fault.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

ST 25/6 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.32 pm