

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING

Minutes

FRIDAY, 21 JULY 2017

PRESENT: Councillor E Fallows (Chair)

Councillors G Bond, D Fowler, T Hall and H Mawdsley

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor D Ogden

APOLOGIES: Councillors K J Jackson and P Wilkinson

1 **URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS, IF ANY (24 HOURS NOTICE TO BE PROVIDED TO THE CHAIRMAN).**

There were no urgent items.

2 **TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING.**

The date quoted on the agenda front sheet was incorrect (Friday 1 July 2016) though the actual Minutes enclosed within the agenda pack were correct (Friday 24 March 2017). Councillor D Fowler noted that his apologies had not been recorded for the meeting.

RESOLVED – That, subject to the addition of the apologies for Councillor D Fowler, the Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 March 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY:**

There were no declarations made.

4 **USING SOCIAL MEDIA - PRESENTATION**

Executive Director and Monitoring Officer Mark Trillo introduced this item, which was included on the agenda after a discussion at the previous meeting regarding the number of complaints being received associated with the use – or misuse – of Social Media (SM).

Senior Officer (Governance & Member Support) Linden Vernon gave a presentation showing how the use of SM had increased over recent years, with many different forms of SM available and new ones appearing regularly.

Each SM site offered easy communication and engagement, but posed its own dangers, for which precautions were required. Improper use involved inaccurate information being posted, offensive or upsetting items being posted and fake identities being created.

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Precautions needed in the use of SM included:-

- Set time to one side to maintain accounts;
- Be mindful of who you may connect to;
- Be careful when forwarding comments – check the veracity of the subject matter. You may still be held equally as responsible as the original commentator;
- Don't use informally – can give rise to misunderstandings. Conduct yourselves as you would in a council meeting or by letter. Once a comment has been made it will be almost impossible to withdraw;
- Ensure that access to accounts are password protected.

Mark Trillo confirmed that a large proportion of the difficulty when dealing with complaints was establishing whether comments were posted personally or in their capacity as a Councillor. This was often a grey area and presented difficulty in drawing the line. Guidance was included in the presentation as to how to ensure that SM use complied with the relevant Code of Conduct as follows:-

- Ensure content is objective, balanced, informative and accurate;
- Show respect for others – do not use SM to be rude or disrespectful;
- Do not disclose confidential information about people or the Council;
- Repeated negative comments about or to individuals could be interpreted as bullying or intimidation;
- Abide by the laws of equality – do not publish anything that might be seen as racist, sexist, ageist, homophobic or anti-faith.

Members discussed the subject at length, including:-

- the Data Protection Act and the requirement for individual councillors to register as Information Holders. The Information Commissioner had the power to penalise individuals and organisations. Their powers were to be further extended in April 2018;
- the Freedom of Information Act and the requirement for councillors to respond to relevant requests;
- The SM guidance would be incorporated into the Council's I.T. Policy, an updated version of which would go through the scrutiny process.

5 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED - That pursuant to Section 100A (2) and (4) of the Local Government Act , 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings whereby it is likely that confidential information as defined in Section 100A (3) of the Act would be disclosed to the public in breach of the obligation of confidence or exempt information as defined in Section 100i (1) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act would be disclosed to the public by virtue of the Paragraphs indicated.

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6 **TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING.**

The date quoted on the agenda front sheet was incorrect (Friday 1 July 2016) though the actual Minutes enclosed within the agenda pack were correct (Friday 24 March 2017).

The Committee approved the Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2017.

7 **STANDARDS COMMITTEE - COMPLAINTS MONITORING REPORT**

Members noted the contents of a report regarding complaints made under the Code of Conduct.

The meeting closed at 11.05 am

_____Chairman _____Date