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**Minutes of the meeting of the ECC and Essex Fire Authority Joint Standards Committee, held in Committee Room 2 County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex on Wednesday, 25 January 2017**

**Present:**

Cllr T Cutmore (Chairman)	ECC
Cllr S Barker	ECC
Cllr A J Bayley	ECC
Cllr C Guglielmi	ECC
Cllr M McEwen	ECC
Cllr C C Pond	ECC
Cllr A Watkins	EFA (Thurrock)
Cllr A Woodley	EFA (Southend)

Mr Norman Hodson, Independent Person, was also in attendance.

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Kim Cole (Principal Solicitor), Andy Gribben (Council and Member Support Officer) and Paul Turner (Interim Monitoring Officer)

**1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Essex County Councillors T Durcan, T Higgins and A Wood, Essex Fire Authority representative Councillor A Erskine (ECC) and Independent Person Mr. J Swan.

**2 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3 To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2016**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2016 were approved and signed as a correct record.

**4 Matters Arising**

Arising from Minute 6: *Dispensations for County Councillors who are also District Councillors or Members of the Essex Fire Authority*; Paul Turner, Interim

Monitoring Officer, agreed that he would write to all Members after the forthcoming election in May to ensure that all those who might require dispensations might apply.

## **5 Updated Social Media Protocol**

The members of the Committee considered a report (SC/01/17 and appendix) concerning a revised Social Media Protocol presented by Paul Turner, Interim Monitoring Officer, Essex County Council, to provide guidance to members of Essex County Council and the Essex Fire Authority based upon their Codes of Member Conduct.

Members of the committee discussed matters that related to the security of emails, documents and other sensitive information.

Members of the Committee suggested amending the protocol to make specific reference to the inappropriate use of photographs or images. The Interim Monitoring Officer agreed to consider what would be helpful.

It was also agreed that Councillors should seek advice before posting comment relating to an emerging emergency situation such as a fire or flood and this might confuse residents or be contrary to those real-time directions being issued by the emergency services.

### **Resolved**

That the Committee adopts the revised social media protocol as appended to the report (subject to the suggested revisions outlined above) and agreed that it should be then circulated to all members of the County Council and Essex Fire Authority.

## **6 Declarations of interest guidance**

The members of the committee considered a report (SC/02/17 and appendix) presented by Paul Turner, Interim Monitoring Officer, Essex County Council, that provided draft guidance on declarations of interest to be sent to all members of the County Council.

It was agreed that the current guidance was complex, particularly as they relate to those declarations that may be made at meetings, and that updated written guidance on the requirement for members to make a declarations of interest would be beneficial.

There was detailed discussion about the differences between Declarations of Pecuniary Interests (DPIs), Code of Conduct Interests and Dispensations that may be given to members by the Monitoring Officer.

It was agreed, following discussion, that the guidance be amended to remove the words 'paid councillor' and replaced with a 'councillor receiving an allowance' (or similar wording). I was also agreed that reference be made in the guidance to the need to make a declaration, not just when at a public meeting but when, if appropriate, in discussion with an officer.

It was intended that the guidance would be reviewed by the monitoring officer and reissued as and when required.

It was agreed by the members of the committee that the guidance should be made available to members following the forthcoming elections.

### **Resolved**

That subject to the above comments the Committee endorses the new guidance on declarations of interest and it be sent to all Members of the County Council.

## **7 Annual review for 2016**

The members of the committee considered a report (SC/03/17) by Paul Turner, Interim Monitoring Officer, Essex County Council, that presented an overview of standards issues and developments at Essex County Council over the last year.

The report outlined developments and improvements in:

- Registration of Interests,
- Declarations of Interests at Meetings,
- The New Code of Conduct,
- Training,
- Dispensations,
- ECC Webpage for the public to make complaints against Members,
- Numbers of Complaints received, categories and commentary, and
- The revised Social Media Protocol.

Members discussed and agreed the need to check and update their online register of interests. It was also noted that an email to officers would be sufficient and indeed welcomed by officers of Democrat Services in order to enable them to update the online record.

It was requested that future Annual Review Reports to the Standards Committee might provide more detail (suitably anonymised) of complaints against members and the subsequent recommendations.

### **Resolved**

1 That the report be noted

2 That, following the 2017 ordinary elections to the County Council, all members should be strongly urged to undertake training on matters relating to The Code of Conduct and standards issues, that the induction pack to new members should identify that need and that attendance should be reported to the Standards Committee.

**8 Date of Next Meeting**

To note that the next meeting of the committee will be scheduled to be in approximately six months or when business is identified. Members will be advised.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 11:15am.

**Chairman**