

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Civic Affairs Committee held on
Thursday, 9 September 2021 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Anna Bradnam – Chair
Councillor Dr. Claire Daunton – Vice-Chair

Councillors: Henry Batchelor Nigel Cathcart
Mark Howell Heather Williams

Officers: Patrick Adams Senior Democratic Services Officer
Rory McKenna Monitoring Officer

Councillors Cllr Martin Cahn and Cllr Dr Richard Williams were in attendance remotely.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Bridget Smith and Aidan Van de Weyer.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Heather Williams and Nigel Cathcart both declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 5 Update on Code of Conduct Complaints, as it was probable that they knew the parish councillors of Bassingbourn Parish Council who were the subject of a complaint.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the 10 June 2021 had not been included in the agenda papers. It was noted that these would be agreed at the next meeting.

4. Code of Conduct

Councillor Heather Williams introduced this report, as the Chair of the Anti-Bullying Task and Finish Group. She explained that the Group unanimously supported the new Local Government Association Code of Conduct and its attempt to tackle harassment. An implementation date of May 2022 would allow time to train councillors on the new Code of Conduct.

The Monitoring Officer stated that the new Code of Conduct and its guidance would make it easier for the public and councillors when processing complaints. He recommended the extensive guidance from the Local Government Association, which was included in the agenda.

Parish councils

The Monitoring Officer explained that each parish council in the District could decide whether or not to adopt the new Code of Conduct.

Register of Interest forms

The Monitoring Officer explained that councillors would be required to complete a new Register of Interest form if the new Code of Conduct is adopted.

Processing complaints

In response to questioning the Monitoring Officer explained that cost of an investigation could not be recovered from unsuccessful complainants and in his view members of the public should feel able to make a complaint without the threat of costs being awarded against them should a complaint not be upheld. It was noted that the Council had a Policy for handling unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complainants and could declare a complainant vexatious if necessary.

Acting in the capacity of a councillor

The Monitoring Officer advised that if councillors declared that they were not acting in their capacity as a councillor then they could not be in breach of the Code of Conduct. There was guidance in the agenda on this issue.

Councillor Dr Claire Daunton welcomed the new Code of Conduct and its reference to respect, politeness and courtesy in speech. Councillor Nigel Cathcart supported the new Code of Conduct and welcomed the definition of bullying and disrespectful behaviour.

By affirmation the Committee

Recommended to Council the adoption of the Model Code and Guidance to take effect from May 2022.

5. Update on Code of Conduct Complaints

The Monitoring Officer presented this report, which updated the Civic Affairs Committee on complaints cases regarding alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct.

The Committee **Noted** the report.

6. Date of Next Meeting

The Committee noted that its next meeting would take place on Tuesday 7 December at 10 am.

The Meeting ended at 10.30 a.m.
