

### **Democracy and Standards Committee**

Held at 7.00 pm on Tuesday 6th June, 2023, at The Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby, Northants, NN17 1QG

#### **Present:**

Councillor Andy Mercer (Chair)  
Councillor Jean Addison  
Councillor Wendy Brackenbury  
Councillor Melanie Coleman

Councillor Ian Jelley (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Matt Keane  
Councillor Paul Marks  
Councillor Dorothy Maxwell  
Councillor Michael Tye

#### **Officers:**

Adele Wylie, Director of Customer and Governance/Monitoring Officer;  
Carol Mundy, Senior Democratic Services Officer (Members/Committees).

#### **59 Apologies for absence**

**Resolved** to note that apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carter, Fedorowycz, Hallam and Harrison.

#### **60 Members' Declarations of Interest (if any)**

The chair invited those present, who wished to do so, to make any declarations of interest.

**Resolved** to note that no declarations were made.

#### **61 Approval of the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2023**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2023 were received.

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting of 13 March 2023 be approved and signed as an accurate record of the meeting.

#### **62 Membership of the Constitutional Working Group**

The report of the Executive Director Customer & Governance (Monitoring Officer) was received to enable membership of the Constitutional Working Group for the Municipal year 2023/2024 to be agreed.

The terms of reference for the working group stipulate that the membership of the group must be reviewed annually.

The working group was made up of six councillors, four Conservative councillors, one Labour councillor and one Green Alliance Councillor.

It was agreed that the names of the councillors who would sit on the working group would be provided post the meeting. It was also agreed that if one of the appointed

members was unable to attend, a substitute from the group, already sitting on the main committee, would be permitted.

The chair of the working group was agreed to be the chair of the Democracy and Standards Committee, Councillor A Mercer, and that in the absence of the chair, Councillor I Jelley would act as substitute.

**Resolved** that:

- (i) The membership of the Constitutional Working Group for 2023/24 be agreed as six members, four Conservative councillors, one Labour councillor and one Green Alliance councillor;
- (ii) Councillor A Mercer, as chair of the Democracy and Standards Committee, would be appointed as the chair of the Constitution Working Group for 2023/2024 and that in the absence of the chair, Councillor I Jelley would act as substitute.

### **63 Suggested Items for the Forward Plan for 2023-24**

The Executive Director Customer & Governance (Monitoring Officer), presented the suggested topics for discussion at future meetings to the committee and explained in more detail what each related to.

Members referred to the NNC Elections 'Candidate Diversity Strategy' and asked where this emanated from. The Executive Director believed it was from a motion submitted to Council and she would provide more information on this in due course.

Regarding the promotion of Voter ID, a Councillor asked if this could be added to the forward plan. The Executive Director clarified that this was an operational issue and a legislative piece of work that was ongoing. Encouragement was already being given to the electorate to apply for photographic ID if they didn't have a passport or another form of photo ID already.

Members raised concern that some voters were not aware of the requirement and whether there would be enough NNC resource to undertake an influx of requests near to the election period.

The Executive Director clarified that there had been a national campaign during the recent election period which would be repeated when the next local elections were expected. Applications could be made for voter ID now and at any time in the future. The election team has a Senior Engagement Officer to encourage and target all communities. There were also a number of 'Visiting Officers' who would communicate with the electorate about this topic. Publicity would be increased nearer the election period too.

The Executive Director confirmed that during the 'election period' most council staff would assist with anything that the election team required to be carried out and there would be enough resource to ensure that everyone could exercise their right to vote. Project Plans were already in place in anticipation of the local elections and if there was a General Election called.

A question was asked about where the election count would be held if the Kettering Leisure Village was no longer available. The Executive Director informed the meeting that discussions in this regard were ongoing.

The chair noted that the next meeting of this committee would be after the consultation on the Boundary Review had concluded. The Executive Director clarified that responses to the review would not be submitted by the Council but would be submitted by the Political Groups, and it would be the outcome of the review that would be reported to this committee.

**Resolved** that the suggested topics for discussion be included on the forward plan for 2023/2024.

#### 64 **Code of Conduct - National Learning Case Studies**

The report of the Executive Director of Customer & Governance (Monitoring Officer) was received to provide information on case studies from other local authorities, on the application of the Code of Conduct, or matters relating to councillor behaviour.

The report referenced two case studies from Teignbridge District Council and Cheshire East Council and detailed the findings and outcome of the investigations.

The chair welcomed the report and considered it was important to keep abreast of case law from across the country. He considered that the standards and ethics of NNC were impressive but there should be no complacency.

Councillors asked if there were independent persons in place.

The Executive Director clarified the process following receipt of a complaint, which included the initial assessment of the complaint, an overview by a governance lawyer and deputy monitoring officer, followed by the opinion of the monitoring officer, before the involvement and assessment by one of the three experienced independent persons.

Comments were made about the previous standards regime, which had been considered extreme in many cases, though there was also some concern that the current scheme was a little too laid back.

**Resolved** that the case studies and comments made be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.45pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....