

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON THURSDAY 6 JULY 2023 AT 2:00 PM
IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON**

Attending:

Members: George Bisson (Chair)
Zoe Clewer
Steve Trow

Officers: Rosalind Alderman Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Nigel Stone Chief Finance Officer
Jo Murphy Information and Data Protection Officer

7 Apologies for Absence

7.1 There were no apologies for absence.

8 Declarations of Interest

8.1 All Members had a personal but non-prejudicial interest in both items 4 and 5 as they would be subject to the procedures and policies therein once adopted.

9 Minutes

9.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2023 were approved as a correct record.

10 Chair's announcements

10.1 The Chair thanked officers for the hard work that had gone into the papers.

11 Public Question Time

11.1 There were no public questions.

12 Review of Members' Code of Conduct, Member Complaint Process and Local Protocols (SC 54/23)

12.1 Rosalind Alderman introduced the report and emphasised the importance of keeping our processes under regular review. She reminded Members that the Code of Conduct, Member Complaint Process and Local Protocols formed a key part of our governance framework.

12.2 Ms Alderman explained that, as set out in the report, the review incorporated elements of the Cabinet Office Code (which applied directly to the NPA's Secretary of State appointed members, in any event) and the Local Government Association's model Code of Conduct. She stated that she had also considered the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' response to the CSPL report.

- 12.3 Ms Alderman drew members' attention to a small number of administrative amendments to the paper, such as updating 'Chairman' to 'Chair' in accordance with the house style and adding a reference to Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) alongside Article 10 of the ECHR. Members noted and agreed these changes.
- 12.4 Ms Alderman explained that, since drafting the report, a further clause was now proposed to be added to the Member Complaints Process that would provide clarity on the procedure to be followed in the event that the NPA received a request from a complainant that their identity is withheld from a specified party (or parties) involved in the matter which was distinct from anonymous complaints. Members supported the inclusion of this additional clause.
- 12.5 Members discussed whether it was appropriate to introduce a provision into the Member Complaints Process to the effect that a Member may informally be invited not to attend meetings of the Authority or its Committees pending the outcome of a complaint (as set out in paragraph 3.4 of the report). Members did not support the introduction of such a clause, as there would be no lawful basis for including such a provision, and it would be problematic in that it could give rise to allegations of bullying and undue influence or predetermination of the outcome of the complaints process, and possibly even to legal challenge. Moreover, there would be no way of enforcing that member's absence from the NPA's business because the Authority had no power to impose a suspension. Members noted that this matter could be revisited, if appropriate, in the future, as part of the regular review process.
- 12.6 Members reviewed the Code of Conduct, Member Complaint Process and Local Protocols page by page and made various proposals and suggestions which would be reflected in the draft report to be considered by the Authority at its meeting on Thursday 13 July 2023.

***Resolved*, that subject to the amendments agreed at the meeting as reflected in the report to the full Authority, the revised Code of Conduct, Member Complaint Process, the Protocol for Member and Officer Relations, and the Protocol for Members and Officers Dealing with Planning Matters, attached as Annex 2, Annex 4, Annex 5 and Annex 6 to report (SC 54/23), be recommended to the Authority for adoption.**

Voting: Unanimous

13 Members' Social Media Policy (SC 55/23)

- 13.1 Members considered the draft Members' Social Media Policy and noted that it had been based upon and conformed closely with the social media policy for staff members.
- 13.2 Members reviewed the policy and raised issues such as re-ordering the bullet points, streamlining items that were considered repetitive and providing additional clarification on aspects of the policy that Members felt were ambiguous or needed further explanation.

- 13.3 The detailed recommendations and suggestions made by Members would be reflected in the report to be considered by the Authority at its meeting on Thursday 13 July 2023.

Resolved, that subject to the amendments agreed at the meeting and reflected in the report to the full Authority meeting, the draft Members' Social Media Policy, attached as Annex 1 to report (SC 55/23), be recommended to the Authority for adoption.

Voting: Unanimous

14 Any other items which the Chair decides are urgent

- 14.1 There were no urgent items.

15 Date of next meeting

- 15.1 Monday 30 October 2023 at Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington

The meeting closed at 3.35 pm.

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Chair

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Date