

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

5 NOVEMBER 2014

PRESENT

Councillor J. Holden (in the Chair).

Councillors Dr. K. Barclay, R. Bowker, C. Boyes, L. Dagnall, Mrs L. Evans, M. Freeman, D. Jarman, K. Procter (Vice-Chairman), A. Williams; and Mr. D. Goodman, Mr. C.E.J. Griffiths and Mr. A. Rudden.

In attendance

Monitoring Officer (Ms. J. Le Fevre),
Senior Democratic Services Officer (Mr. J.M.J. Maloney).

Also In attendance – Mr. M. Whiting (Independent Person).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P. Myers and Mrs. S. Royle

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made by Members.

2. CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE 2014/15

RESOLVED – That it be noted that, at its Annual Meeting on 11th June 2014, Council appointed Councillors J. Holden and K. Procter as Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively of this Committee.

3. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE 2014/14

The Committee received for information details of its membership for the municipal year 2014/15. It was reported, in respect of the vacancy for an Independent Co-Opted Member, that the post had been advertised, applications received, and that an appointment, made under the auspices of the Chairman and Monitoring Officer, was expected shortly.

RESOLVED – That the membership of the Committee, as determined by Council at its Annual Meeting on 11th June 2014, be noted.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE COMMITTEE 2014/15

RESOLVED – That the Terms of Reference for the Committee, as determined by Council at its Annual Meeting on 11th June 2014, be noted.

5. MINUTES

Standards Committee

RESOLVED – That, subject to minor corrections in the attendance lists, the Minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2013 and of the special meeting held on 9th May 2013 be approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

6. COMMITTEE FOR STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE - PUBLICATIONS

The Monitoring Officer introduced a report presenting and summarising two documents produced by the Committee for Standards in Public Life – “Ethics in Practice: Promoting Ethical Conduct in Public Life” and the Committee’s Annual Report.

The first paper presented an overview of practices across Local Government aimed at promoting high standards of ethical conduct, and laid stress on areas such as induction procedures for newly-elected Members and ongoing training. The Monitoring Officer summarised local practice in these areas, noting that it was planned, with input from Standards Committee, to refresh induction arrangements following the next local elections, and an opportunity was provided for Members to comment.

Strong support was expressed for robust induction training, with the suggestion being raised that greater importance should be laid on Members’ attendance. This raised the question of the timing of induction sessions to facilitate attendance.

It was also suggested and agreed that there was an important and ongoing role for political groups and Group Leaders to promote high standards of conduct, and that the allocation of mentors to newly-elected Members could assist with this. The Committee agreed that its Members would convey this suggestion to the respective Group Leaders.

Support was also expressed for ongoing / refresher training, it being noted that some long-serving Members had not had Standards issues reflected in their initial inductions. The areas of Members’ roles in relation to the Development Control process and as school governors were raised as being particularly suitable for guidance. The Monitoring Officer advised that the content of training, and appropriate modes of delivery, would be explored further in liaison with officers responsible for Member Development.

In respect of the Annual Report, it was noted that it was a wide-ranging document. It reiterated concerns regarding some of the impacts of provisions in the Localism Act, such as the dilution of sanctions available to local Standards Committees, but also noted that the introduction of “Independent Persons” to participate in complaint handling had had an effect in reducing the incidence of trivial or vexatious complaints. Other significant issues included the importance of induction training, scope for promotion of ethical procurement, and the positive impact of Individual Electoral Registration in tackling electoral fraud.

RESOLVED -

Standards Committee (5.11.14)

- (1) That the content of the report be noted.
- (2) That it be noted that Standards Committee would have input into refreshing induction arrangements for newly-elected Members.
- (3) That the Committee's Members approach the respective Group Leaders to highlight the role for political groups / Leaders in promoting high standards of conduct, and request that they consider the allocation of mentors to newly-elected Members.
- (4) That the Monitoring Officer explore further the content of training, and appropriate modes of delivery, in liaison with officers responsible for Member Development.

7. LOCAL STANDARDS UPDATE - ISSUES

The Monitoring Officer provided the Committee with an oral report summarising significant standards issues in the local environment. The position was generally positive, with no complaints received of sufficient gravity to require referral to the Committee. There had been no need over the past year to refer significant proposed Constitutional changes to the Committee, although it was possible that referrals might be required in the foreseeable future.

The Monitoring Officer had attended a range of meetings of Committees and other decision-making bodies. Whilst a number of areas had been identified for attention, including planning-related declarations of interests and procedures in relation to substitute Members, in general these bodies were well conducted, their reports met requirements, and sound decision-making resulted.

RESOLVED – That the content of the report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 7.16 pm