

Minutes of a meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE on Wednesday 1 November 2017

Committee members:

Councillor Sanders

Councillor Upton

Councillor Wade

Councillor Pressel

Parish Councillor Gordon Roper
(Blackbird Leys Parish Council)

Officers:

Andrew Brown, Scrutiny Officer/ Committee and Member Services Manager

Lindsay Cane, Acting Head of Law and Governance

Pat Jones, Committee and Member Services Manager

Jennifer Thompson, Committee and Members Services Officer

Also present:

Jill McCleery (Independent Person)

Ben Simpson (Independent Person)

Apologies:

Councillors Fry and Rowley sent apologies.

Godfrey Cole and Chris Bellinger (Independent Persons) sent apologies.

1. Election of Chair for 2017/18

Councillor Sanders was elected as Chair for the remainder of the municipal year.

2. Election of Vice-Chair for 2017/18

Councillor Upton was elected as Vice-Chair for the remainder of the municipal year.

3. Declarations of Interest

None.

4. Minutes of previous meeting: Friday 18 December 2015

The Committee approved as a correct record the minutes of the previous meeting on 18 December 2015 subject to amending the format of the attendance to separate councillors, parish representative and independent persons.

5. Assessment Panel decision notices 2016-17

The Committee considered the report of the Monitoring Officer setting out the work carried out by the Assessment Panel since January 2016.

The Chair thanked the Independent Persons for their support and the time and expertise they gave to their role on the Assessment Panel.

The Committee noted that there had been relatively few cases of alleged breaches of the code of conduct and that the Assessment Panel had either recommended no action or limited action. Once the Assessment Panel had made its decision and recommendation, and the Monitoring Officer had taken the action he considered necessary, the case was closed.

Councillors noted that the press interest generated by the re-publication of assessment panel decisions from over a year and over six months ago was not in the interests of the public or the councillors. They recommended that officers consider how and when to present these decisions to the committee to avoid a repetition.

At the end of the meeting, the Committee resolved to exclude the press and public and move into confidential session to allow a discussion of matters which may involve the disclosure of sensitive personal information about individuals. The public were excluded but officers and the independent members remained.

In light of the elections in May 2018 and the need to make reasonable adjustments for councillors with a disability, the Committee discussed the standards expected of, and the process of handling allegations of breaches of the code of conduct by, councillors who may have a disability or be suffering from a health problem.

The Committee noted that all councillors must be held to the same high standards of behaviour expected in the code of conduct.

When an allegation of a breach of the code of conduct was made, the Monitoring Officer was able to make an initial assessment and would seek to resolve the complaint if there was obviously a misunderstanding and no breach. However, Councillors' conduct was a matter of public interest and therefore the expectation was that the normal process would be followed.

The Assessment Panel when considering an allegation of a breach of the code could take into account any mitigating factors as a result of a known disability or health problem when reaching their decision and making recommendations to the Monitoring Officer.

They concluded that all councillors would be expected to meet the same standards of behaviour, but the process and matters to be taken into account on assessment of particular allegations would be appropriate to individual circumstances.

The Committee agreed to note the decision notices issued by the Assessment Panel and the comments above.

6. Standards training 2017 report

The Committee considered the report of the Monitoring Officer setting out the summary of the code of conduct and other training in 2017 and the outline of the training programme for 2018.

The Committee and Members Services Manager introduced the report and outlined the programme of non-compulsory planning training and briefings on topical issues running in 2017/18. In May and June 2018 a full compulsory and non-compulsory training programme would be offered including training on how to navigate the new General Data Protection Regulations.

The Committee noted that compulsory training was decided by the Monitoring Officer. Currently this included an induction on election; annual code of conduct training; planning training each election year; and licensing training for relevant committee members.

The Committee in discussion made comments including:

- Training dates should be sent out to existing members early and to all candidates as soon as possible after nominations closed.
- Providing training and briefings required a very significant commitment from officers and councillors were to be encouraged to attend the organised sessions.
- It would be useful to offer parish councils code of conduct training to allow members to discuss and ask questions about this.
- The difficulties of providing appropriate training sessions to all councillors when they had such a broad range of experience and knowledge; and the benefit of interactive sessions including examples for discussion.

The Committee agreed to note the report and their comments above.

The Committee noted this was Pat Jones' (Committee and Members Services Manager) last attendance at the committee and wished her well on her imminent retirement.

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.00 am

Chair

Date:

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