

# Standards Committee Minutes

Date: 6 January 2015

Time: 6.15 pm – 6.50pm

**PRESENT:** Councillor A D Collingwood (in the Chair)

Councillor Mrs J A Adey, Councillor I Bates, Councillor D J Carroll, Councillor Mrs G A Jones, Councillor B R Pollock JP, Councillor J A Savage, Parish Cllr Mrs V Smith and Councillor R Wilson

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor W J Bendyshe-Brown

Apologies for absence were received from G Houalla and Parish Cllr Ms N Howard

## 11 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2014 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

## 12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

## 13 CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

The Chairman reported that Parish Councillor John Sherlock had decided not to stand for re-election as one of the three Parish Council Observers on the Standards Committee nominated by Wycombe District Association of Local Councils.

On behalf of the Committee the Chairman thanked Parish Councillor Sherlock for his support, both to himself and the previous Chairman, over the four years during which he had served on the Committee and wished him well for the future.

## 14 REVIEW OF INDEPENDENT PERSON TRAINING

The Committee received a report which informed Members about recent training which had been attended by Mr Pearce, Independent Person, and the Monitoring Officer.

Mr Pearce reported that the training had provided the opportunity for Independent Persons and Monitoring Officers to share practical information about their roles. Discussions within the group had indicated that Wycombe's Standards regime was operating well, and was broadly in line with other authorities in the South East. One alternative practice which he had noted was that in some councils the Independent Person and Monitoring Officer held regular meetings even when there were no active cases: however, the Monitoring Officer reminded the Committee that whilst it

is helpful for the Independent Person and Monitoring Officer to meet from time to time, it is important for the Independent Person to remain independent and that this could be compromised if such meetings were very frequent.

The Monitoring Officer endorsed the view that Wycombe is in line with other authorities across the country: this had been evidenced by a survey of the delegates who had attended, which indicated that Wycombe was in the largest group in most categories. The Monitoring Officer undertook to circulate a summary of the survey responses to Members. One alternative practice which had been noted was that some councils had nominated one Independent Person as the person to be consulted by the Monitoring Officer and the other Independent Person as the person to be consulted by the subject; however, the Monitoring Officer expressed her view that this is not the best approach, as it can restrict the role of the individual Independent Persons, and this was endorsed by the Committee.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the need for training for Independent Persons would continue to be monitored.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## **15 FUTURE TRAINING FOR STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

The Committee received a report which provided a review of the training sessions which had been held for Members over the last year. Members were also invited to express a view on the arrangements which should be made for Standards training following the 2015 elections.

The Monitoring Officer reported that there had been good opportunities for Members to update themselves on Standards matters throughout the year, with two sessions having been provided; however, training was not mandatory. In debate comment was made that whilst Members may attend training, there is no mechanism for checking that the information presented has been understood, and some members supported the idea of a compliance test. It was also recommended that as new Members have a significant amount of information to absorb, it would be helpful to provide a follow-up session once they have settled in to their new role and to provide ongoing support and reference material within induction packs to which they can refer at their own pace. The responsibility of Group Leaders in ensuring that Members attend training and understand the importance of Standards matters was highlighted.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That all Members, both new and returning, be recommended to attend the planned post-election induction sessions on Standards, with Group Leaders urged to encourage attendance;
- (ii) That a follow-up training session, and ongoing support, be made available to Members.

## 16 REVIEW OF CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS AND STANDARDS COMPLAINTS ARRANGEMENTS

The Committee received a report which presented options for a potential review of the current Code of Conduct for Members and Standards Complaints process.

The Monitoring Officer reminded Members that the current Code had been in operation since 1 July 2012, when the current Standards arrangements for local authority members came into force. At its meeting on 27 March 2012, before the final picture under the Localism Act was clear, Standards Committee had agreed to recommend to full Council, amongst other things, 'that Council strongly recommend to fellow authorities in Buckinghamshire that there be a shared common code of conduct under the new Standards Regime, along with common arrangements in respect of complaints thereunder.' Subsequent analysis has revealed a degree of discrepancy amongst some of the Codes in use across the county, and for this reason, together with the fact that the current arrangements have been in place for over two years, Members agreed that a review of the operation of both the Code of Conduct and Standards Complaints process, a consideration of potential amendments, and an analysis of other authorities' Codes and complaints processes, would be beneficial.

The Monitoring Officer reminded Members that there was no scope to change the sanctions which could be imposed on Members against whom complaints were upheld.

**RESOLVED:** That an interim report on potential amendments to both the Code and complaints arrangements, including a comparison of arrangements in other parts of the county, be brought to the next meeting.

## 17 INFORMATION SHEETS

**RESOLVED:** That Information Sheets 01/2014 and 02/2014 be noted.

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Chairman

### **The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:**

Emma Lund - Senior Democratic Services Officer  
Julie Openshaw - District Solicitor