

Standards Committee Minutes

Date: 10 March 2015

Time: 6.15 - 6.40 pm

PRESENT: Councillor A D Collingwood (in the Chair)

Councillor Mrs J A Adey, Councillor I Bates, Councillor D J Carroll, G Houalla, Councillor Mrs G A Jones, M Pearce, Councillor B R Pollock JP, Parish Cllr Mrs V Smith, Parish Cllr Mr B Swain and Councillor R Wilson, Councillor J L Richards OBE

Apologies for absence were received from Parish Cllr Ms N Howard and Councillor J A Savage

18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

19 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

20 REVIEW OF CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS AND STANDARDS COMPLAINTS ARRANGEMENTS

Following the request made at the last meeting that an interim report on potential amendments to both the Code of Conduct and standards complaints arrangements be brought to the Committee, Members considered a report which had been produced by Hoey Ainscough Associates providing a broad independent overview of Code of Conduct and standards complaints arrangements which are in place across the country and within Buckinghamshire. The report included information on the types of Codes in place; issues arising; approaches adopted by different authorities in terms of a 'rule-based' or 'behaviour-based' approach; handling of interests; case handling processes; and different approaches towards the role of the Independent Persons.

In discussion the Committee felt that Wycombe's approach towards the role of the Independent Person was in line with best practice, and it was recommended that the current arrangement in respect of the Independent Persons should be retained as part of any review. It was also suggested that Parish Councils may benefit from increased input from the Independent Persons and Monitoring Officer (on an exception basis), and this was endorsed.

It was noted that there were some differences between the various Codes in place within Buckinghamshire, and Members considered whether a common approach across the county would be most beneficial, or whether the Council should seek to

adopt the best and most robust Code, and accept that this may result in differences with local Codes. Following discussion it was agreed that the latter approach would be preferred, but noted that Parish Councils should be consulted on the review in order that they could consider elements of best practice.

The District Solicitor confirmed that following discussion with the Chairman a regular report would be brought to the Committee providing an overview of standards complaints which had been dealt with.

Four options for next steps were set out in the report. A proposal to agree option iv (consider amendments to both Code and complaints arrangements) was put to the vote and it was

RESOLVED: to consider amendments to both the Code of Conduct and standards complaints arrangements with a further report to be brought to the Committee in June 2015.

21 INFORMATION SHEETS

The Committee received Information Sheet 01/2015 (Complaints / Comments / Compliments – Information and Improvements Quarter 3).

Members commented that further detail with regard to what had happened in respect of those complaints which were answered out of time and further clarity regarding the specific targets would be helpful; and that it would also be helpful if the Information Sheet included details of the actions being taken by services which receive repeatedly high levels of complaints (such as Parking Services and Waste).

RESOLVED: That Information Sheet 01/2015 (Complaints / Comments / Compliments – Information and Improvements Quarter 3) be noted.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

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