

Standards Committee Minutes

Date: 15 November 2016

Time: 6.00 - 6.35 pm

PRESENT: Councillor C Etholen (in the Chair)

Councillor Mrs J A Adey, Councillor S Broadbent, Councillor M Clarke, Councillor A R Green, Councillor K Ahmed and Councillor A D Collingwood

Parish Council Members: Parish Councillor Mr A Cobden

Independent Members: Mr G Houalla and Mr M Pearce

9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs W Mallen, Councillor R Raja and Councillor Savage.

10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declaration of interests were received.

11 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12 MODERN SLAVERY TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT

The Committee considered a report which set out the reasons for publishing a voluntary Modern Slavery Statement.

Members were informed that a key provision in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 requires larger commercial organisations with a turnover in excess of £36 million to publish a "slavery and human trafficking statement". Although it is not a statutory duty for the Council to provide a Statement, it is considered good practice to publish a voluntary Statement as an example of the Council's commitment to help prevent slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour and human trafficking entering its supply chains.

It was reported that one other local authority, East Lindsey DC, has published a voluntary statement and the Corporate Governance Group concluded that it would be good practice for Wycombe District Council to publish a Statement. It was noted that the Council already has numerous strands of preventative work in place and these measures would provide evidence of the Council's commitment. Council services were therefore collaborating to prepare a draft Statement.

The Committee discussed the report and received clarification on a number of queries:

- As well as other areas, procurement would be a key area of the Statement and would evidence work already being undertaken.
- Enforcement was the role of the Police and other enforcement agencies. However it was important for the Council, as a matter of good governance, to take steps to prevent modern slavery entering its supply chain.
- Forced marriage is an aspect of modern slavery.
- The cost of the work to undertake the Statement was not known; however it was emphasised that good practice was already being undertaken and officers would provide evidence for the Statement.
- The Statement would provide positive steps in partnership working and the Council would need to make sure that the mechanisms were in place to report any suspected illegal activity.

Once finalised the Statement would be published and updated annually and would include any further steps taken.

It was suggested that the draft Statement be presented to the next Committee meeting for consideration before publication.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report be noted and;
- (ii) the draft Modern Slavery Statement be brought to the Standards Committee with a further report for consideration at the next meeting.

13 COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE - ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16

The Committee was provided with information regarding the Annual Report 2015-16 of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) and its work programme for the forthcoming year.

It was reported that two new appointments had been made to the CSPL, namely Jane Ramsey and Dr Jane Martin, who were replacing retired members and would take on the post for a five year term.

Highlights in the annual report included information on a review of the offence of Misconduct in Public Office on which the CSPL has strongly encouraged the discussion of sanctions and consequences in the event of any transgression. Local government standards continue to be monitored by the CSPL and it will maintain a

watching brief on the need for a mandatory code of conduct, strong local leadership, effective independent persons and concern at the lack of sanctions.

The perceived lack of effective sanctions has been particularly highlighted by the CSPL as a nationwide issue and will continue to be an issue to which the CSPL will be giving its attention. Standards training for members on the 29 November will include some national case studies where conduct had fallen short of criminal action but weaknesses in the current regime may have been identified.

It was noted that further reports regarding the CSPL would continue to be brought to the Standards Committee for consideration.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

14 QUARTERLY COMPLAINTS UPDATE

A report was submitted which provided an overview of recent complaint cases regarding Member conduct since June 2016.

It was noted that since the last meeting there were no outstanding complaints and no complaints had been concluded. One new complaint had been received but this was subsequently withdrawn by the complainant. There were no current outstanding complaints.

The continuing small number of complaints suggests that ethical standards continue to be taken seriously by local Councillors.

Members noted that the update Standards training would be taking place on the 29 November.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

Julie Openshaw - District Solicitor
Jemma Durkan - Senior Democratic Services Officer