

Standards Committee Minutes

Date: 7 June 2016

Time: 6.15 - 6.42 pm

PRESENT: Councillor C Etholen (in the Chair)

Councillor Mrs J A Adey, Councillor S Broadbent, Councillor M Clarke, Councillor A R Green, Councillor R Raja and Councillor JA Savage,

Parish Council Members: Parish Councillor Mr A Cobden

Independent Members: Mr G Houalla

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mr B Swain, Cllr Mrs W Mallen and Mr M Pearce.

It was noted that the Committee pass on their best wishes to Mr Pearce during his recovery.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declaration of interests were received.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 COMMITTEE ON THE STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE - NEWSLETTER

The Committee considered a report which provided information on newsletters published by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL).

Members noted that the CSPL was established in 1994 with Lord Nolan as its first Chairman, and the first report established the seven principle of conduct, now known as the Nolan Principles. It was reported that the CSPL was currently chaired by Lord Bew and the terms of reference for the committee were expanded in 1997 and 2013. The committee continues to advise on ethical standards across the whole of public life in the UK.

It was reported that the CSPL produced quarterly newsletters which were available online and the latest Spring Newsletter 2016 had previously been circulated to Members via email. This edition included various points as follows:

- Response to a report on transparency of the public appointment process.
- An exploration of the Committee's Ethics for Regulators Review project.
- Coverage of evidence given by the Chairman Lord Bew, and former Chairman Sir Christopher Kelly, to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Trade Union Bill.
- An update on the Committee's approach to policing.
- The Committee's further response to the Government's response to the report on "Strengthening Transparency around Lobbying".
- Publication of a new online guide for public service providers.
- A response to the Law Commission's review of the offence of misconduct in public office.
- A response to a publication of a consultation exercise by Kathryn Hudson, the Independent Parliamentary Commissioner, to help her review the current Code of Conduct for MPs.
- Notification of a new member, Monisha Shah.
- Highlighting blogs published by the Committee.

It was queried who had the authority to appoint members to the CSPL. The District Solicitor confirmed that she would circulate the response after the meeting. In response to another query it was reported that the Council's Members have an obligation to comply with the Council's Code of Conduct which is based on the same principals as standards set by the CSPL.

The District Solicitor requested that if members would like the newsletters to be reported in a different format in the future to contact her with any suggestions. It was suggested that a shorter link to the newsletters be included in future reports and the District Solicitor agreed to explore this.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

5 ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR PROVIDERS OF PUBLIC SERVICES - SELF ASSESSMENT

A report was considered which summarised guidance issued in December 2015 by the CSPL to help public bodies assess their compliance with ethical standards.

The guidance set out a template to undertake a self-assessment and to establish good practice and the draft template, which had been examined by the Corporate Governance Group, was appended to the report. No areas of non-compliance had been identified although a number of action points had been identified to continue to maintain high standards. The District Solicitor confirmed that these had been or were being progressed.

A question was asked relating to the Council's processes for checking the ethical standards of outside organisations who receive grant payments, and the District Solicitor agreed to provide details of these to Committee members.

It was suggested that a refresher training session be arranged for members on standards of conduct with emphasis on social media. In response to a query it was

noted that the Officer Corporate Governance Group membership included several senior officers. In response to a question on the final action point the Committee noted that templates for equalities, environmental issues and health and safety etc., were already set up for suppliers and were already incorporated in all tender procedures, so that after consideration, it was not considered that a defined Supplier Code of Practice was needed.

RESOLVED: That the self-assessment based on the guidance on ethical standards for providers of public services and the action points arising from it be noted and endorsed.

6 QUARTERLY COMPLAINTS UPDATE

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

Members were informed that since the last meeting three complaints had been dealt with. As reported in January, two were ongoing and in the meantime a third had been submitted. Two complaints related to members of Parish Councils and the third related to a member of WDC. All three complaints proceeded to Stage Two, however after consultation with an Independent Person it was decided that none of them justified a full investigation being carried out. Detailed decision notices were issued to the complainant and subject members setting out the reasoning for the decisions.

There were no current outstanding complaints.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

7 SUPPLEMENTARY ITEMS (IF ANY)

There were no supplementary items.

8 URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

There were no urgent items.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

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