

REVIEW OF INDEPENDENT PERSON TRAINING

Officer contact: Julie Openshaw Tel: 01494 421252
Email: julie.openshaw@wycombe.gov.uk

Wards affected: All

PROPOSED DECISION

To note the Independent Person training course which has taken place, receive feedback on aspects raised, and discuss any key issues and/or best practice arising out of it.

Reason for Decision

To share information about the training amongst Committee members in order to support future practice and enable the Council to make best use of the training.

Corporate Implications

1. Under Section 28(7) of the Localism Act 2011 the Council is obliged to have appointed at least one Independent Person. Wycombe District Council has chosen to appoint two Independent Persons. The statutory role of an Independent Person is to provide views before the Council makes its decision on any allegation that it has decided to investigate, and they may also be asked by the Council for views in relation to an allegation where no investigation has been commenced, or by a member or co-opted member, either of the District Council or a parish or Town Council, if that person's behaviour is the subject of an allegation.

Executive Summary

2. Update training has recently been offered to the Independent Persons with the objective of sharing practical information about their roles within different Councils, and best practice, and one of the Independent Persons has attended the training course.

Sustainable Community Strategy/Council Priorities - Implications

3. Apart from the legal obligation, the appointment of Independent Persons supports the Community Involvement theme of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

Background and Issues

4. As noted above, the two Independent Persons have a role to participate in the handling of cases where complaints are lodged relating to the conduct of elected members, both of the District Council and Parish Councils within the District. They are also invited to committee meetings and routinely attend to participate in debate, as observers, but with a valuable role and bringing added insight to the committee's work.

5. Upon their appointment, each Independent Person undertook external training on the nature of their role, which was new, and for which there was little precedent at the time to guide future involvement.
6. Since, then, each Independent Person has gained practical experience of involvement in the complaints handling process. In order to ensure the Independent Persons have the opportunity to share their practical experience and learn from others undertaking the same role, particularly in light of the legislative scope for different Councils to interpret the role in slightly different ways, further training has been offered, and the most recent seminar took place in March 2017. One of the Independent Persons, Mr Gilbert Houalla was able to attend the training; it will be recalled that Mr Michael Pearce and the Monitoring Officer attended a similar course in late 2014, and reported back to Committee in January 2015.
7. Elements of the training course included the national perspective, the limitations and opportunities for Independent Persons under the current standards framework, a focussed group discussion about the role, and a case study and discussion. This report enables feedback to be provided so that the committee can discuss any aspects raised.

Options

8. There are no options.

Conclusions

9. Debate upon this report will enable the whole Committee to share information about the Independent Person's role, how other Independent Persons carry out their roles, and to consider how they may be able to best support the terms of reference and objectives of the Committee.

Next Steps

10. The need for further training for the Independent Persons will continue to be monitored.

Background Papers

None.