

**Meeting of the Standards Committee
Minutes of the Meeting Held on Wednesday 20 March 2013**

Present:

Mr R Bearman
Mr B Hannah
Mr R Hanton
Mr M Langwade

Mrs J Leggett
Mr T Tomkinson
Mr J Ward

Also in Attendance:

Ms V McNeill – Head of Law and Monitoring Officer

1. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2013 were confirmed by the Committee and signed by the Chairman.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

4. Urgent Business

There was none.

5. Standards Performance and Monitoring Report

5.1 The annexed report by the Head of Law and Monitoring Officer was received.

5.2 The following points were made:

- More information was requested in future reports under the list of complaints, with more facts and figures on each so Members could see at what stage a particular complaint was at and that the Information appear in chronological order.
- A letter of sanction had been sent to Mr Murphy as agreed at the meeting held on 1 February 2013.
- Following the outcome of hearing Mr Martin, a member of the public, had taken action in the form of lodging a corporate complaint against the Committee for its unreasonableness in reaching the decision that it had. The complaint was passed to the Ombudsman and had been rejected. The only avenue open to Mr Martin now was a judicial review.

- Member training was very important and the Chairman suggested that a log be kept confirming all the training Members of the new Council had attended and that all Members attend a session on the Code of Conduct and the Standards regime at the County Council. Training was not mandatory for Members but would be actively encouraged.
- The Members Support and Development Advisory Group encouraged Member training and this would be progressed through each group leader.
- Even though the process of the actual hearing had not changed to a great extent, the process of getting to that stage had changed, so it was important for all Members who would sit on the Standards Committee to receive detailed training on the process and how to make judgements. It was very important that Members were familiar with the process as many case studies showed that very intense training was needed as cases did not occur very often and if given thorough training the public could have confidence that the Committee was making good judgements.

5.3 In response to being asked what lessons could be learned from the hearing meeting held on 1 February, the Head of Law stated that as the procedure had not changed since the last hearing and sufficient had been learnt from that to make the latest one run very smoothly. The Chairman was very clear over how to conduct the meeting and made the procedure clear to all present. She thought that the hearing was well chaired and the process was as fair and open as it could have been.

5.4 Other Members of the Committee felt that the hearing was dealt with very well and in a balanced way. It was suggested that the Independent person could be involved in future in the training of the Committee. Other Members felt that the Independent Person should receive the same training as the Members of the Committee. The Chairman stated that it was not mandatory for the Independent Member to take part in training the same as for elected Members. He suggested that the Independent Person could be asked to address the Committee at a session and comment on the training provided, so he would be involved in the process.

5.5 It was reported that a full and open selection process was followed to appoint the Independent Person for which there were many candidates and the interview process was a very rigorous one. A small remuneration was paid for the role of £25 per hour. It was noted how important it was for the process to be transparent and it was felt that a similar situation would exist when the next Independent Person was appointed.

5.6 Mr Bearman asked that the Head of Law design a training programme for the Committee and that he would be happy to assist her in this task.

5.7 The Chairman expressed his sadness that a Member of the Committee had given information to the press about the way in which votes were cast in the closed part of the hearing meeting on 1 February 2013, which he felt was reprehensible and said that he had made a complaint to the Head of Law about this Member and was extremely disappointed that this action had been necessary.

RESOLVED:

- 5.8
- To note the County Council's performance in relation to standards. To approve the format of the performance and monitoring information subject to more information being included under the list of complaints, with more facts and figures on each so it could be seen at what stage a particular complaint was at and that the Information appear in chronological order.

6. Hearing of the Standards Committee

6.1 The annexed report by the Head of Law and Monitoring Officer was received.

6.2 The following points were noted:

- The Committee's concerns over training had been addressed in the recommendation at 4.1. Group leaders would be responsible for encouraging their Members to attend the training.
- Democratic Services kept a record of all the training courses attended by Members.
- With regard to sanctions that could be imposed it was reported that these were not actually set out in the Localism Act but they were clarified subsequently in information received from Counsel. They were set out in the Statutory Instruments issued at a later stage.

6.3 **RESOLVED:**

- That all Members attend training in standards and ethics following the elections in May 2013.
- To note the report.

6.4 The Chairman bid farewell to the Committee and wished his fellow Members well for the future.

6.5 Mr Hanton thanked Mr Tomkinson for chairing the Committee and wished him well in his retirement.

The meeting finished at 11.35am

Chairman



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