

STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 DECEMBER 2014

AT 4.35 PM

IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, WILLITON

Present:

Mr T Evans Chairman

Councillor J Davies

Councillor J Fulwell

Mr I Gunn

Councillor K H Turner

Councillor S O de Renzy-Martin

Mr J Gamlin

Councillor P H Murphy

Councillor D J Westcott

Officers in Attendance:

Monitoring Officer (B Lang)

Meeting Administrator (K Kowalewska)

SA10 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

SA11 Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 September 2014

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee held on 23 September 2014 - circulated with the Agenda.)

RECOMMENDED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee held on 23 September 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

SA12 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were declared.

SA13 Public Participation

No member of the public had requested to speak.

SA14 Review of the Standards Regime

The Monitoring Officer provided an update as to the current situation following discussions held at the last meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee on 23 September 2014 when it was resolved to continue with

the standards regime currently being operated at West Somerset Council with no proposals to make any changes to the process.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the Taunton Deane Borough Council's (TDBC) Standards Committee had requested the Constitutional Sub-Committee to review their current working arrangements as there was some dissatisfaction concerning the fact that the parish and co-opted members were not able to fully participate in the voting process, and as a result TDBC's Full Council had approved that following the May 2015 Elections the Committee would become a Standards Advisory Committee in a similar format and way of working to that of WSC, with a composition of five Borough councillors, three Parish councillors and three independent persons, enabling any Committee member to be Chair. However, there were still differences in terms of how complaints were dealt with between the two Councils.

RECOMMENDED that the Monitoring Officer's update be noted.

SA15 Training for Councillors following the Local Government Elections in May 2015

(A copy of the Induction Programme planned before the last Elections in 2011 – circulated with the Agenda.)

Members of the Committee were asked to consider what should be included in the Induction Programme for Councillors following the Elections in May 2015. Councillor P Murphy was Member Champion for WSC in terms of member development and he was currently working on a fit for purpose programme with officers and the TDBC Member Champion, Councillor G Slattery, and an objective input would be useful. It was noted that in addition to the in-house programme, there would be opportunities for Members to attend regional events and various 'taster days' in conjunction with SALC and TDBC. The induction programme would also be an opportunity to provide a refresher for returning Members.

Councillor Murphy provided clarification about his role as Member Champion and confirmed that although he did not have direct responsibility for parish and town councils, WSC did have a role to encourage professional conduct and to provide support to parish and town councils.

In terms of training and development for parish and town councils, who adopt their own code of conduct, the Monitoring Officer advised that his statutory role was to ensure register of interests were correctly completed and appropriately available to the public, and that a process was in place to consider complaints about alleged breaches of the code of conduct. There was no requirement upon WSC to ensure that parish and town councils were appropriately trained but there was a recognised role that the district council would provide support on code of conduct issues.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that awareness sessions about code of conduct would be included in the induction programme as well as training on planning, as both topics were deemed to be important and worthwhile.

For the benefit of new and returning Councillors it was suggested that the layout of the 2011 programme should be broadly repeated with changes made regarding the Hinkley Point element, however there was scope for it to be further developed to include the element of working across two councils. It was noted that engaging with experienced Councillors and role play was beneficial. The point was also made that it would be useful if a few members of the Standards Advisory Committee could contribute to the induction programme by attending one of the code of conduct training sessions for parish and town councils.

RECOMMENDED (1) that code of conduct training be included within the induction programme.

RECOMMENDED (2) that the induction programme be adapted to include partnership working.

RECOMMENDED (3) that, subject to the availability of resources, training to be provided to parish and town councils, in consultation with SALC, and that committee members would like to participate and become involved.

SA16 **Proposed Social Media Policy and Recording of Meetings Protocol**

The Monitoring Officer reported that West Somerset Council had recently approved a Social Media Policy and Recording of Meetings Protocol which provided guidance and a framework for Councillors and staff, and he provided the Committee with a summary of the information contained therein. He advised that complaints may be received relating to social media.

RECOMMENDED that the Monitoring Officer's update be noted and a copy of the Recording of Meetings Protocol and Social Media Policy be circulated to Members of the Standards Advisory Committee.

SA17 **Monitoring Officer's Update**

The Monitoring Officer reported on activities undertaken since the last meeting and Members of the Committee noted that no formal complaints had been received. He had attended a useful training session with Louise Somerville Williams on the role of the independent person where one matter being flagged up related to the challenges with dealing with extreme cases of bad behaviour in the light of the lack of sanctions that would act as an effective deterrent to serious cases of inappropriate conduct.

In light of changes being made, there was a need to update the Constitutions for both West Somerset and Taunton Deane Councils and an update on progress would be provided at the next meeting.

Finally, he informed that a member of the public had raised an issue regarding whether special treatment should be made of councillors who are sub-contractors to direct contractors with Council and whether there should be a requirement to include such an interest in their register of interests. The Monitoring Officer would be discussing this matter with other Monitoring Officers in Somerset.

RECOMMENDED that the Monitoring Officer's update be noted.

SA18 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee was scheduled for 3 March 2015 at 4.30 pm.

The meeting closed at 5.40 pm