

STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 JUNE 2015

AT 4.30 PM

IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, WILLITON

Present:

Mr T Evans Chairman

Councillor J Davis

Mr J Gamlin

Councillor P H Murphy

Councillor D J Westcott

Councillor S O de Renzy-Martin

Mr I Gunn

Councillor N Thwaites

Officers in Attendance:

Monitoring Officer (B Lang)

Meeting Administrator (K Kowalewska)

Executive Assistant (J Miller)

SA1 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

SA2 Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and Members and Officers introduced themselves.

SA3 Appointment of Chairman

RESOLVED that Mr T Evans be appointed Chairman of the Standards Advisory Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

SA4 Appointment of Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED that Mr I Gunn be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Standards Advisory Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

SA5 Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 December 2014

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee held on 9 December 2014 - circulated with the Agenda.)

RECOMMENDED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee held on 9 December 2014 be noted and would be

confirmed as a correct record at the meeting of Council to be held on 17 June 2015.

SA6 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were declared.

SA7 Public Participation

No member of the public had requested to speak.

SA8 Composition of the Committee

The Monitoring Officer advised that, following the elections in May 2015, the composition of the Standards Advisory Committee had not changed, however, as a result of Councillor J Fulwell no longer being a parish councillor in West Somerset, there was a vacancy for one of the town/parish council representative positions on the Committee. Mr Fulwell's good wishes were conveyed by the Monitoring Officer to the Committee Members.

Members of the Committee were asked to consider a course of action for filling the vacancy. As there was no prescribed process, the Monitoring Officer suggested that, on behalf of the Committee, he would write to all West Somerset town/parish council clerks informing them of the vacancy, giving a period of time for them to seek if anyone wished to put themselves forward for the position. Anyone interested would have to provide a brief résumé as to why they wished to be considered for the role.

During the debate the following specific issues were raised:

- Details of who applied were requested to be received by all members of the Committee, giving members a period of time to comment, before the Chairman and Monitoring Officer made a decision.
- It was necessary to have criteria in place to assist the selection process in order to demonstrate some form of objectivity and fairness.
- Parish/town councils should be given the chance to vote on the candidates so that it could be seen as a fair process and the responsibility of making the decision would not be solely placed on the Standards Advisory Committee.
- Delegate decision to Chair and Monitoring Officer, or set up a selection committee.
- There was no need to make the process too onerous.
- It was important that parish councils had confidence in the system and that the applications would be properly judged.
- No resources to run an election as was previously undertaken by the Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC).

On consideration of the points raised, it was

RECOMMENDED that the process for filling the parish/town council representative position on the Standards Advisory Committee be as follows:

The Monitoring Officer would contact all West Somerset parish/town council clerks via email requesting nominations for the vacancy; the email would also include an explanation of the work of the Standards Advisory Committee and a description of the role. The submitted nominations would then be circulated to all Committee Members for their comments, and, at the same time, a follow-up email would be sent to parish/town councils detailing the list of applicants with a request for them to express a preference for any of the candidates. Four weeks would be allowed for each stage in the application process.

SA9 Training for Councillors following the Elections in May 2015

Further to discussions on Councillor training at the last meeting, the Monitoring Officer provided an update on the code of conduct training that was provided as part of the District Council Induction programme.

The Monitoring Officer outlined the proposals for providing training to parish and town councils. He advised that the training would be free of charge and up to three sessions, at different times of the day, would be offered over a 2-3 week period. The training would be held in the Council Chamber at West Somerset House, and offered to parish clerks as well as councillors, during early Autumn.

In response to a question, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that he would be liaising with SALC to ensure the content of the training was consistent.

The Committee would be advised of the dates, when confirmed, and Members would be invited to attend and become involved if they so wished.

During the discussion of this item, the Monitoring Officer explained the sanctions available to the Committee and the standards regime regarding a code of conduct complaint, and there was a request that the complaints process be expanded upon in the training programme.

RECOMMENDED that the Monitoring Officer's update be noted.

SA10 Draft Annual Governance Statement 2014/15

(A copy of the Draft Annual Governance Statement 2014/15 – circulated prior to the Meeting as a supplementary agenda item.)

The Committee was requested to make comments on the standards/code of conduct/behavioural elements which were referred to in the Draft Annual Governance Statement for 2014/15. The Monitoring Officer highlighted the key information contained within. He drew particular

attention to the fact that during the period from April 2014 to March 2015 no formal complaints had been received about any West Somerset Council Member and suggested this information should be included in the document as it was a good measure and reflected that Members of WSC were adhering to the code of conduct.

Concerns regarding better ways of promoting the Area Panels to encourage more members of the community to attend was raised during the discussion of this item.

RECOMMENDED to include in the Draft Annual Governance Statement 2014/15 that during the period from April 2014 to March 2015 no complaints had been received about Members of West Somerset Council.

SA11 **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.

Following the busy election period, training was the next priority. The Monitoring Officer reported that all 28 WSC Councillors had completed and submitted their Register of Interest forms and the information would be uploaded on to the Council's website in due course.

It was noted that due to limited resources, the publication of parish and town councillor register of interests on the website would be an ongoing piece of work, but the Monitoring Officer was aware of his responsibility and would continue to monitor and review the receipt of forms. He would provide an update on the matter at the next meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee.

RECOMMENDED that the Monitoring Officer's update be noted.

SA12 **Date of Future Meetings**

- Due to the Monitoring Officer not being able to facilitate at the next meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee, the date was rescheduled to 13 October 2015 at 4.30 pm.
- 8 December 2015 at 4.30 pm in the Council Chamber, West Somerset House.
- 1 March 2016 at 4.30 pm in the Council Chamber, West Somerset House.

The meeting closed at 5.35 pm