

Standards Advisory Committee – 28 March 2017

Present: Councillors Davies and Mrs Smith
Michael Marshall and Bryn Wilson (Parish Council representatives),
Anne Elder and Lynn Rogers (Co-opted independent members of the
Advisory Committee)

Officers: Bruce Lang (Monitoring Officer) and Richard Bryant (Democratic Services
Manager)

1. Appointment of Chairman

Resolved that Mrs Anne Elder be appointed Chairman of the Standards
Advisory Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

2. Apologies/Substitution

Apologies:- Councillors Gaines, James, Miss Smith and Wren and Mrs Louise
Somerville-Williams (Independent Person).

Substitution:- Councillor Mrs Smith for Councillor Miss Smith.

3. Changes to the Membership of the Standards Advisory Committee

The Democratic Services Manager, Richard Bryant, reported that since the
last meeting both Mr Terry Bowditch (Co-opted independent member) and Mr
Bill Sparrow (Parish Council representative) had resigned from the Advisory
Committee.

4. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee held on 15
March 2016 were taken as read and were signed.

5. Declaration of Interests

Mrs Anne Elder, declared a personal interest as a Public Governor of the
Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust.

6. Raising Standards : Parish Council Health Checks

This item was deferred due to the indisposition of the Mr Justin Robinson,
County Executive Officer of the Somerset Association of Local Councils.

The item would be added to the agenda of the next meeting towards the end
of May 2017.

7. Discontent with the current Standards Regime

Richard Bryant reminded the Advisory Committee of the meeting held with Rebecca Pow MP on 29 April 2016 where the concerns of the Committee as to the weakening of the Standards Regime in Local Government following the introduction of the Localism Act 2011 had been discussed.

A summary of the points made was subsequently sent to Rebecca Pow who had undertaken to bring this to the attention of the appropriate Minister.

Unfortunately, a response from the Minister was still awaited.

Mr Bryant went on to report that Taunton Deane was not alone in thinking that the effectiveness of the Standards Regime had been diminished. Indeed, a letter was currently being prepared by Sedgemoor District Council's Monitoring Officer which would be sent to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

It was hoped this letter would be signed by the Chairmen of all Standard Committees throughout Devon and Somerset.

During the discussion of this item, Members reported that many of the Parishes were unaware of the very limited sanctions that could be imposed on a Councillor who had breached the Code of Conduct. However, the view was also expressed that publicity of a breach through the local media was something most Councillors – whether Borough or Parish – would seek to avoid and would therefore moderate their behaviour accordingly.

The Advisory Committee did agree that it would be timely for a reminder to be sent to all Councillors about the necessity to comply with the terms of the Code of Conduct and to offer further copies, if Members wished to receive it.

Resolved that the report be noted.

8. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 2 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

9. Update on complaints made against Councillors

The Monitoring Officer, Bruce Lang, provided a detailed report on the complaints that had been received by him over the past twelve months, the action that had been taken to deal with the matters raised and the outcomes.

A total of nine complaints relating to Councillors in four of Taunton Deane's Parishes had been received and one further complaint was anticipated.

In addition, two complaints had been raised against Borough Councillors one of which had been resolved without having to use the formal investigation route, whilst the other was still in the early consideration stage.

Resolved that the report be noted.

10. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Advisory Committee would be held on Tuesday, 23 May 2017 at 2.30 p.m. in the John Meikle Room at The Deane House.

(The meeting ended at 3.58 p.m.)