

Standards Advisory Committee – 14 November 2017

Present: Anne Elder (Chairman)
Councillors Davies, Gaines, Hall and James
Michael Marshall and Bryn Wilson (Parish Council representatives)
Lynn Rogers (Co-opted independent member of the Advisory Committee)

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

The meeting commenced at 2.30 p.m.

29. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee held on 17 July 2017 were taken as read and were signed.

30. Declaration of Interest

Mrs Anne Elder declared a personal interest as a Public Governor of the Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust. She added that she would cease to be a Governor on 30 November 2017.

Councillors Gaines and James declared personal interests as Members of Wiveliscombe Town Council and Wellington Town Council respectively.

31. Complaints against Councillors

The Monitoring Officer, Bruce Lang, provided a verbal update on three complaints that had been received by him since the last meeting of the Advisory Committee, the action that had been taken to deal with the matters raised and the outcomes.

Two of the complaints related to Parish Councillors.

The first related to two Councillors allegedly showing a lack of respect towards each other following a difference of opinion at an informal meeting of the Parish Council.

Both Councillors had admitted that there had been a clash of views and one had since resigned from the Parish Council as a result.

In the view of Mr Lang, there was no need to formally investigate the matter as neither side was likely to change their views. The complainants had simply taken things too personally.

The second complaint concerned a matter raised at a Parish Council meeting by a Councillor in relation to his neighbour without declaring an interest.

The neighbour had initially complained to the Parish Council and, as a result, had offered to resign. Mr Lang had felt that it was not necessary for the

Councillor to follow this course of action particularly as an interest had been declared at recent meetings and the subject Member had taken no part in subsequent discussions.

As no one had disputed the facts, there was no need to undertake a formal investigation.

Members of the Advisory Committee wondered why the Chairman and/or the Clerk to the Parish Council had not initially advised the subject Member as to his apparent interest. They also questioned why an apparently private issue had come before the Parish Council?

In response to the latter query, Mr Lang reported that the matter had been discussed as it appeared to be a safety issue.

The third complaint related to a Borough Councillor in connection with the consideration of a high profile planning issue by the Council.

The complainant had subsequently made a Subject Access Request to the Council. This had revealed that the Councillor the subject of the complaint had made some disparaging – but not offensive – comments about the complainant.

Mr Lang had spoken to the Councillor who had agreed to make an apology to the complainant which had been accepted.

The Chairman stated that these days great care needed to be exercised in what was said in all forms of communication used by Councillors. She requested that greater emphasis was given to this matter when new Councillors received their induction training.

Resolved that the report be noted.

32. Discontent with the current Standards Regime

Reference Minute No. 25/2017 the Democratic Services Manager, Richard Bryant, reported the receipt of a further letter from the Minister for Local Government, Marcus Jones MP.

The letter re-iterated that the Government was committed to reviewing the current arrangements even though Mr Jones was of the view that they were, in his view, adequate.

Resolved that the contents of the letter be noted.

33. Visits to Parish Councils

Referring to the earlier item relating to complaints about Parish Councillors, Mr Rodgers felt that the time had perhaps arrived to re-activate the visits Members of the former Standards Committee used to make to Town and Parish Councils in the area.

Such visits not only gave the opportunity for the 'Standards Flag' to be waved but allowed Members to observe the operation of meetings and provide

advice about things such as interests, if asked.

Resolved that this suggestion be noted.

34. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Advisory Committee would be held on Tuesday, 23 January 2018 at 2.30 p.m. in the Committee Room at the Brittons Ash Community Centre, Bridgwater Road, Bathpool, Taunton.

(The meeting ended at 3.31 p.m.)