

Standards Committee – 11 April 2013

Minutes of the meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **11 April 2013** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Vice-Chairman: Cllr D Merrick

Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn
Cllr Mrs G A Lucas-Gill

Cllr Mrs C M Mason
Cllr I H Ward

INDEPENDENT PERSONS (INVITEES NON-VOTING)

Mr M G Drage
Mrs L Walker

PARISH MEMBERS (CO-OPTED NON-VOTING)

Cllr Mrs D Constable
Cllr Mrs L A Vingoe

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr P Beckers, Mr D J Cottis and Mr S Shadbolt.

OFFICERS PRESENT

A Bugeja - Head of Legal, Estates and Member Services/Monitoring Officer
M Power - Committee Administrator

62 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

63 NEW STANDARDS REGIME – UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Legal, Estates and Member Services on the activities of the Standards Committee in 2012/13 and providing an update on the changes made to the Standards regime following implementation of the Localism Act 2011. Reference was also made to a guide for Councillors 'Openness and transparency on personal interests', which had been issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

In response to questions, the following was noted:-

- An Independent Persons Protocol had been adopted by the Council as part of the changes made to the standards regime following implementation of the Localism Act 2011. However whilst the Protocol had

not yet been fully tested due to a low number of complaints, the Independent Persons had provided the Monitoring Officer with assistance and advice in a number of cases which had helped in the resolution of those matters.

- In order to ensure sufficient understanding of the new standards arrangements, District Councillors and Parish/Town Councillors received Code of Conduct training in 2012/13; further training will be provided in the new municipal year. The public has access to the new standards arrangements via the Council's website as well as in an information booklet, which is available in the Council's reception areas.
- The DCLG guidance on how the new standards arrangements can be applied by District and Parish/Town Councils is advisory, The obligation is on individual Councillors to ensure that their register of interests is kept up to date if circumstances change.
- Any dispensation granted to an individual Member will be recorded in the Member's register of interests, which is available to the public.
- The rules relating to disclosure of a Member's pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests are covered in detail in the Council's Code of Conduct. Under the new arrangements there is emphasis on transparency and the onus is on individual Councillors disclosing and declaring matters they have an interest in. If Members are uncertain about any aspect of the new standards arrangements they can seek advice from officers.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

64 MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT 2013/14

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Legal, Estates and Member Services on the proposals for the Member Learning and Development Programme for 2013/14.

In response to concern at the number of Members who had not attended any or only one of the courses designated as Highly Recommended in the 2012/13 training programme, it was noted that it is up to individual Members to decide which sessions they attend. Although it was recognised that training is a valuable tool for Councillors, it is not possible to compel Members to attend sessions and long-standing Members may not feel the need to attend all of the courses that are offered. It was requested that statistics be provided to the Committee that show how attendance at Member training sessions in 2012/13 compare with attendance in previous years.

It was noted that a charge for Parish/Town Councils of £40 per person per course had been introduced for those training courses considered appropriate. Where the session relates to a matter that would benefit the District Council for Parish/Town Councils to attend, there is no charge. Officers were asked to ensure that details of both the chargeable and free sessions are provided to Parish Clerks as soon as they are known.

It was requested that a reminder is sent to District Councillors prior to each mandatory Development Committee training course and that this includes details of the consequences of non-attendance at these sessions.

It was felt that there was value both in the end of year questionnaires, which give Members an opportunity to reflect on the past year's training as a whole as well as inform the training for the forthcoming year, and in the post-course evaluation forms, which provide immediate feedback. It was requested that the design of both forms be examined and changed where appropriate.

Resolved

- (1) That the summary of Members' attendance at training sessions during the Municipal Year 2012/13 as set out in paragraphs 2.1 to 2.10 of the report be received.
- (2) That the proposals for the Member learning and Development Programme for 2013/14 as set out in paragraphs 5.1 to 5.12 of the report be endorsed.

The meeting closed at 8.35 pm.

Chairman

Date

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