
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 14 November 2017 from 7.00 pm - 7.56 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Tina Booth, Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chairman), Derek Conway, Duncan Dewar-Whalley (Chairman), Paul Fleming, Sue Gent, Alan Horton, Ken Ingleton, Ben Stokes and Roger Truelove.

Independent Persons (non-voting): Patricia Richards and Christopher Webb.

KALC representatives (non-voting): Parish Councillors Graham Addicott and Dave Austin.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby and Donna Price.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Mike Henderson.

APOLOGY: Parish Councillor Amanda Saunders.

321 INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and invited those present to introduce themselves.

322 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

323 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 November 2016 (Minute Nos. 984 – 989) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The Minutes of the following Standards Hearing Sub-Committees were also taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record: 23 January 2017 (am and pm meetings – Minute Nos. 1114 - 1125); 27 January 2017 (am and pm meetings – Minute Nos. 1146 - 1157) and 19 June 2017 (Minute Nos. 33 – 38).

324 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

325 ANNUAL MONITORING OFFICER REPORT

The Monitoring Officer introduced her report which provided an overview of the Monitoring Officer work in the past year; an opportunity to review and learn from experience; and a wider context to the importance of good ethical behaviour.

The Monitoring Officer briefly outlined each section of the report, and welcomed questions and comments from Members on her first report as Monitoring Officer. The report showed that the year to end of October 2017 had been one of the busiest in terms of hearings and complaints received, however, the position had remained relatively stable with any emerging issues being identified and dealt with appropriately.

In respect of section 5 – Good Governance and the Code of Conduct – the Monitoring Officer referred to the Annual Standards Conference where it had been clear that all Monitoring Officers shared the same frustrations regarding the lack of sanctions available under the Localism Act. She drew attention to the update on case law, drawing attention in particular to *Dedmen v ICO 2016*, and *Hussain v Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council 2017*. The only case to be prosecuted under the new Standards regime remained *R v Flower*, details of which were set out in the report.

The increasing use of social media continued to raise issues throughout the country, and the Monitoring Officer referred to the guidance that had been issued to Members regarding this and drew attention to the case law set out in the report.

In response to questions on paragraph 5.13 under the section ‘Local Context’, the Monitoring Officer advised that the term ‘friends’ had replaced the term ‘close associations’, and this was often a matter of predetermination or bias. It was a matter for the Member to consider and declare, and it was important for the Member to consider perception, i.e., what a fair minded individual might think. Any issues of concern of this nature should be reported to the Monitoring Officer. The Monitoring Officer also referred to the training session she had held earlier in the year on the Code of Conduct, and confirmed that parish councillors would be welcome to attend future training on this topic.

In respect of paragraph 5.15 of the report which set out details of historic cases, the Monitoring Officer advised that there were no sanctions to check that the training had been carried out as they were recommendations for the Parish Council. In terms of new complaints, there had been a rise in the number of complaints received, with two being referred for investigation and one hearing being held.

In response to a question concerning Section 8 of the report – Whistleblowing (Protected Disclosure Policy), the Monitoring Officer advised that this was on the intranet as it was an internal document for Council staff, however, she would look into why this document was not also on the Council’s website. She also agreed to clarify the meaning in Section 2 ‘report on sufficiency of resources’ following a question regarding whether there had been a report regarding resources for housing.

In response to further questions, the Monitoring Officer advised that they were not aware of any changes required to the Code of Conduct as a result of changes to the Data Protection legislation. She also agreed to include how many applications had been made regarding applications for directed surveillance (paragraph 13.1) in future reports.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report be noted.**
- (2) That there be no further action to review the Code of Conduct at the present time.**
- (3) That the Hearing Sub-Committee procedure be reviewed.**

326 ANNUAL REPORT ON MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Chairman of the Member Development Working Group (MDWG) introduced the report which provided an update on progress with Member Training and Development since November 2016, outlining progress made by the MDWG and their future work programme.

In introducing the report, he advised that 21 briefings had been held, however, there was an issue regarding poor attendance which he intended to discuss with Group Leaders. Discussions were continuing with IT regarding the availability of the intranet and he was hopeful that e-learning opportunities would soon be possible. The MDWG were now focussing on holding training sessions on key skills, however despite asking Members for feedback, there had only been four responses to date, and he would be following this up with Group Leaders.

A general discussion ensued regarding the briefing sessions, and it was acknowledged that some sessions were less relevant to some Members; that there could be improvements made to officer presentations and delivery; that consideration should be given to including activities such as group discussion, role play, exercises, etc to reflect different learning styles; that perhaps there were too many briefing sessions; and that the majority of sessions were held on Thursdays which were not convenient for all Members. In terms of core skills, whilst there had not been many responses to the questionnaire on training needs, suggestions were made to include public speaking, media skills and charring skills. It was acknowledged that it was often those who needed the training the most who were less likely to attend; and it was suggested that consideration should be given to a variety of methods such as e-learning and video conferencing. The Chairman of the MDWG also advised that the Group were considering induction arrangements for 2019, which was likely to include a Saturday session.

The Chairman thanked Members for their feedback and encouraged any additional feedback to be directed to himself or the Chairman of the MDWG.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Annual Report on Member Training and Development be noted.**

Chairman

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All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel