

Standards Committee

Meeting held 24 June 2015

PRESENT: Councillors Bryan Lodge (Chair), Ben Curran, Alan Law, Mary Lea, Pat Midgley and Vickie Priestley.

Co-opted Members

John Atkinson, Alan Casbolt, Edward Fleming and Councillor Michael Appleby.

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Penny Baker, Colin Ross and Karen Southwood (Parish Town Council Co-optee).

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 There were no items identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the press and public.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest from Members of the Committee.

4. APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY CHAIR

4.1 **Resolved:** On the Motion of Councillor Ben Curran, seconded by Councillor Vickie Priestley, that Councillor Alan Law is appointed Deputy Chair of the Standards Committee for the Municipal Year 2015/16.

5. MINUTES

5.1 The minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 22 January 2015 and 20 May 2015 were approved as correct records.

6. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

6.1 The Director of Legal and Governance reported on the creation of a Member Development Programme. An indicative draft programme was circulated to Members of the Committee at the meeting.

6.2 Members provided comments, as follows:

- Relevant training and guidance should be provided to Members concerning the use of electronic communications.
- It was noted that safeguarding and corporate parenting were matters dealt with by the existing programme and were proposed in the draft programme.

- The venue for future activities should be considered, so as to allow an appropriate level of interaction and questioning.
- Knowledge training for Members would need to be a regular feature of any programme.

6.3 **Resolved:** that (i) the report of the Director of Legal and Governance is noted; and (ii) Members of the Committee are requested to provide any additional comments concerning Member Development to the Director of Legal and Governance.

7. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

7.1 The Director of Legal and Governance submitted the Standards Committee Annual Report 2014/15, for consideration by the Committee prior to the submission of the report to Council in September 2015. The Annual Report highlighted the activities of the Committee and summarised the outcome of complaints received between January 2014 and May 2015. Members' comments were sought on the contents of the Report.

7.2 **Resolved:** that the Standards Committee Annual Report 2014/15 is approved for submission to the meeting of Full Council in September 2015, subject to the deletion at paragraph 10.1 of all of the words after the words "March 2015".

8. UPDATE ON STANDARDS COMPLAINTS

8.1 The Director of Legal and Governance submitted a report providing information on complaints relating to potential breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct, which were considered under the Procedure for Dealing with Standards Complaints in 2014/15. 14 complaints were considered under the Procedure in 2014/15.

8.2 A new Procedure for Dealing with Complaints Regarding City, Parish and Town Councillors and Co-opted Members was approved by Full Council at its meeting on 25 March 2015 and, at the time of reporting, no complaints had been received under this new procedure. Members noted that a review of the new Procedure would take place in 12 months' time.

8.3 **Resolved:** that the contents of the report now submitted are noted.

9. ESTABLISHMENT OF CONSIDERATION AND HEARING SUB-COMMITTEES

9.1 The Director of Legal and Governance submitted a report which sought approval to the establishment of Consideration and Hearing Sub-Committees, following the adoption by Full Council of the revised Procedure for Dealing with Complaints Regarding City, Parish and Town Councillors and Co-opted Members.

9.2 **Resolved:** That this Committee (i) establishes a Consideration Sub-Committee

and a Hearing Sub-Committee in accordance with Article 9 of the Constitution, to discharge the functions in relation to considering investigation reports and hearing complaints in accordance with the Procedure for Dealing with Complaints Regarding City, Parish and Town Councillors and Co-opted Members adopted by Full Council on 25 March 2015;

(ii) agrees that the membership of the Sub-Committees shall be three Members plus one non-voting co-opted member should be present and, where a Parish or Town Council matter is being considered, a representative of the Parish or Town Councils should also be present; and

(iii) delegates authority to the Director of Legal and Governance to make the necessary arrangements for the meetings of the Consideration and Hearing Sub-Committees to be held as and when required.

10. AUDIT OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

10.1 The Director of Legal and Governance submitted a report concerning the Hansard Society Audit of Political Engagement Report 2015, which was the twelfth such audit and which gauged public opinion about politics and the political system and provided a 'health check' on democracy in Britain.

10.2 The Audit recorded public attitudes towards standards of conduct in public life taken from a survey undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL). The report presented a summary of the findings from that part of the Audit which examined standards in public life. The Committee was asked to consider ways in which the Council might improve perceptions of standards of conduct in public life.

10.3 The following observations were made by the Committee:

- People may not make a distinction between Members of Parliament and local councillors.
- Knowledge and perceptions may depend upon an individual's contact with their local authority or local councillor.
- For entries on the register of gifts and hospitality, the item registered might be more significant in terms of perception than the financial value of that item. Similarly, the Members' Register of Interests was open to the public to view and ensuring timely completion or updates of the register demonstrated an ethos of openness.
- The timeliness with which replies were made to constituents' enquiries was important, especially with the public expectation that information technology would provide information faster. Other services in the Council might learn from the practice of the Council's Housing Service, which had set up a dedicated Members' inbox for enquiries from councillors.

10.4 **Resolved:** That the report now submitted is noted.

11. WORK PROGRAMME

- 11.1 The Director of Legal and Governance submitted a report which gave details of the proposed work programme for the Standards Committee. Members were requested to consider the programme and to identify any additional items for inclusion.
- 11.2 Gillian Duckworth, the Director of Legal and Governance, informed Members that, at the conclusion of this meeting, a training session on the Members' Code of Conduct would be provided to the Committee. Members' comments would be sought on the contents of the training, prior to it being delivered to other Members of the City, Parish and Town Councils.
- 11.3 **Resolved:** That the Committee approves the Work Programme for September 2015 to June 2016.

12. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

- 12.1 It was noted that meetings of the Committee would be held on 17 September and 10 December 2015 and 17 March and 16 June 2016.