

## **Standards Committee**

**Monday 8 October 2012 at 6.00 p.m.**

**at the Council House, Walsall**

### **Present**

Councillor Underhill  
Councillor Martin  
Councillor Azam  
Councillor Hussain  
Councillor Phillips  
Dr. A. Sen (Independent person)

### **1/12 Appointment of Chairman and Vice-Chairman for 2012/13**

In view of the fact that this was the first meeting of the Standards Committee in 2012/13, the clerk to the Committee, David Hancock, initiated the proceedings by inviting nominations for the position of Chair for 2012/13

Tony Cox, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, clarified that the regulations which governed the operation of the Standards Committee stipulated that the Committee could not be chaired by an independent person or by a Councillor who was also a member of the Executive.

Following a brief discussion on the matter, Councillor Underhill was duly nominated for the position of Chair for 2012/13.

### **Resolved**

That Councillor Underhill be appointed Chair of the Standards Committee for the 2012/13 municipal year.

### **Councillor Underhill in the chair**

The Chair then sought nominations for the position of Vice-Chair for 2012/13. Councillor Martin was duly nominated for the position of Vice-Chair of the Committee.

### **Resolved**

That Councillor Martin be appointed Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee for the 2012/13 municipal year.

2/12      **Apologies**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Murray and Westley and Mr. Colin Topliss.

3/12      **Minutes**

**Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2012 be approved and signed by the Chair.

4/12      **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

5/12      **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

6/12      **The Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review 2011/12**

The report was submitted:

(see annexed)

John Pryce-Jones, Corporate Policy and Performance Officer, presented the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein.

Members then held a lengthy debate following which it was identified that training on the role and remit of the Committee should be provided as soon as possible to bring members up to speed on what was expected of them in fulfilling their role as members of the Committee.

Further discussion ensued and members requested that future annual review reports provide details regarding the demographics of complainants to enable the Council to analyse if and where there were any trends. In addition, members questioned if the Council advertised or highlighted to its citizens how and where to make complaints to the Ombudsman. The Committee felt that there would most likely be areas within the borough where there would be low data on complaints which could potentially highlight a lack of understanding in the process and provide useful statistical information to the Council by way of breaking the data down into categories such as age, gender, ethnicity and location, etc. By utilising such demographical and statistical information, target areas could be identified to help the Council direct information on the complaints process to those areas where there appeared to possibly be a lack of understanding.

Furthermore, members suggested that, potentially, a useful way to deliver information on this matter to the citizens of the borough would be to send it out with, or by putting it on Council tax booklets.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That members be offered training on the role and remit of the Standards Committee.
- (3) That future reports provide more detail and statistical information on the demographics of the complaints received.

7/12

### **Local Government Ombudsman – Investigation into complaint 10/018/968**

The report was submitted;

(see annexed)

John Pryce Jones, Corporate Policy and Performance Officer and Suzanne Joyner, Head of Community Care (Partnerships) presented the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein.

Tony Cox, Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that reports such as this one came to the Standards Committee historically and it was a requirement that the decision be publicised.

Members questioned whether this report should be considered by scrutiny. John Garner, Head of Democratic Services explained the difference in the role of scrutiny in terms of its role of reviewing policy and holding the Executive to account for which this particular item did not fall within.

Members expressed their concern regarding the findings of the complaint and sought assurance that suitable measures were now in place to ensure that such an occurrence would not happen again.

Suzanne Joyner advised the Committee that the issue in question had occurred in 2008/09 before she had joined the authority and for this reason she did not know the specifics of the case. Suzanne, however, assured members that she would take this issue back to her management team and ensure suitable arrangements were place to mitigate the risk of any such future occurrence. Additionally Suzanne informed the Committee that there was now a quality monitoring team in place which was responsible for supervising this area.

### **Resolved**

That the report be noted.

## **Members' interests - dispensations**

The report was submitted:

(see annexed)

John Garner, Head of Democratic Services presented the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the changes outlined within the report to the regime of granting dispensations to members and co-opted members in respect of disclosable pecuniary interests be noted.
- (2) That it be noted that Council on the 25 June 2012 delegated powers to grant dispensations in respect of disclosable pecuniary interests as set out in paragraph 3.5 of the report.
- (3) That a Sub-Committee, without requirements for political balance, be established for considering applications for dispensations not otherwise delegated to the Monitoring Officer as set out in 3.6 of the report.

The meeting terminated at 7.05 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: