

Standards Committee

Monday 30 January 2017 at 6.00 p.m.

at the Council House, Walsall

Present

Councillor Underhill (Chair)
Councillor Martin (Vice-Chair)
Councillor A. Andrew
Councillor Burley
Councillor A. Ditta
Councillor D. Hazell
Councillor J. Murray
Councillor Young

Independent Persons Present

Dr. A. Sen
Mr A. Green

132/17 Apologies

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor L. Hazell.

133/17 Substitutions

Councillor D. Hazell substituted for Councillor L. Hazell.

134/17 Minutes

It was requested that it be clarified in item '128/16 – the role of the independent person' that having two independent members allowed one to review the complaint with the monitoring officer and the other to review the complaint with the Member who was the subject of the complaint.

Resolved

That the minutes, as amended, of the meeting held on 3 October 2016, copies having been previously circulated to each Member of the Committee, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

135/17 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

136/17 Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)

There were no items for consideration in private session.

137/17 Member training

The Committee considered a report on member training (annexed).

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that the member training programme was currently being refreshed. He noted that over recent years the programme had become ad hoc. Therefore Democratic Services and HR had established a project team to refresh the offer and provide a co-ordinated service to Members. The new programme would be launched following member consultation and would include opportunities to support members in their member role as well as personal development.

The Committee were very supportive of the proposal to refresh Member training and provided the following feedback:

- The need to develop a core programme for all members;
- The programme should be clear about what training was mandatory and which was optional. Members should not be bombarded with requests to attend training;
- The use of external trainers was considered desirable. The LGA Leadership Academy would be a good learning experience for new members;
- Consideration should be given to working in partnership with neighbouring local authorities for economies of scale;
- It should be called 'Member Development' not training.
- The programme should be available to co-opted members and independent persons sitting on council committees;
- Suggestions were made for training to be provided for mandatory training for Appointments Board and safeguarding. Training on public speaking and chairing meetings would also be helpful;
- The usefulness of the former municipal year books to new members was discussed.

The Chair requested a further report on the development of the member training programme at the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. Member training be known as 'Member Development';**
- 2. The Committee take oversight of the development and delivery of the new Member Development Programme.**

138/17 DBS Checks for Members

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services reported that Council in May 2016 had supported the development of local scheme for DBS checks and voluntary self-declarations in May 2016. The number of Members with existing valid DBS checks was currently being audited. The procedure and paperwork to implement the scheme was currently being developed.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. the report be noted;**
- 2. a further report on the implementation of the DBS checks scheme for members be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.**

139/17 Case study complaint

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services provided Members with an example of a redacted complaint. He highlighted the importance of background investigation with all the parties involved in the complaint before producing a thorough report on the issue. He praised the critical role undertaken by the Independent Persons on the committee who provided support and challenge to him as Monitoring Officer and to the Member being investigated.

The Independent Persons present explained to the Committee the importance of an in-depth investigation to establish the facts of each complaint before responding. They felt a detailed report was required to explain to the complainant the lines of enquiry that had been considered when reviewing their complaint.

The Committee discussed the nuances between a Member acting as a Councillor or as a private individual. On this note Members requested to be presented a complaint when it was found that the Member concerned was acting in their role as a Councillor.

In closing the item the Head of Legal and Democratic Services reflected on the political environment in Walsall. He felt that, overall, Member behaviour was good.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. A case study complaint be presented to the Committee where it was found that the Member concerned was acting in their role as a Councillor;**
- 2. The report be noted.**

131/17 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place at 6pm on 25 April 2017.

In closing the meeting the Committee discussed a potential pilot for voters to use identification at elections.

Termination of Meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 6.55 p.m.

Chair:

Date: