

Standards Committee

Monday 22 April 2013 at 6.00 p.m.

at the Council House, Walsall

Present

Councillor Underhill (Chairman)
Councillor Azam
Councillor Murray
Councillor Phillips

In attendance

Mr. A. Sen (Independent person)
Mr. C. Topliss (Independent person)

14/13 **Apologies**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Martin, Hussain, Woodruff and Young.

15/13 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2013 copies having been sent to each member of the Committee, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

16/13 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

17/13 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

18/13 **Standards Committee: Work programme and fundamental skills schedule for the 2013/14 municipal year**

A report was submitted:

(see annexed)

Tony Cox, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, presented the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein.

A discussion ensued during which members questions how the corporate message of standards and good governance was conveyed to staff and if/how it could be improved.

In addition the matter of publication of the new standards regime and complaints procedure was deliberated. The Committee felt that, although it had already been advertised, more publicity was necessary to inform the public of the current procedure for making complaints as well as the requirements under the new standards regime. It was, therefore, agreed that the Chair would liaise with Tony Cox and the communications team with a view to drawing up an appropriate communication to publicise via various and appropriate methods including social media. It was also suggested that a flow chart could be a useful tool to help simplify and explain the process.

A discussion then focused on training and Tony reported that he would be seeking to put all training material specifically for elected members on the intranet as e-learning modules. The Committee expressed concern that not all Councillors attended training sessions. Tony advised that officers would need to be more proactive about how the Council provided training to members, but he felt that e-learning could be an improvement.

At the conclusion of the debate the Chair invited the Committee to convey any additional areas of particular interest to Tony so that those areas could be incorporated within the work programme.

Resolved

- (1) That the work programme and schedule of fundamental skills sessions be approved as set out in Appendix 1.
- (2) That the Chair and Tony Cox liaise with the communications team and draw up an appropriate communication for publication via appropriate media outlets including social media.

19/13 Update on openness and transparency in respect of personal interests

A report was submitted:

(see annexed)

Tony Cox, Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein.

The Committee debated the report and came to the consensus that training should be offered on this matter. Furthermore, it was felt that training should include scenarios and examples would help members, although it was acknowledged that not all eventualities could be covered.

Tony noted the comments of the Committee and advised that he would now review the guidance in conjunction with the Council's own advice on personal interests and see if any tweaking was required so that the two documents were harmonious with one another.

At the conclusion of the debate the Chair asked Tony to circulate the guidance to all members for their information.

Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That Tony Cox circulate the revised guidance on personal interests to all members of the Council for their information.

20/13 Review of Constitution

A tabled report with a revised recommendation was submitted:

(see annexed)

Tony Cox, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, presented the tabled report and highlighted the salient points contained therein, including a revised recommendation to take account of revisions that would need to be made to the articles within the Constitution to enable him to be granted the powers he was seeking.

A discussion ensued during which members questions the practical application of how Tony would carry out such a function as well as seeking assurance on how the process would be governed. It was, therefore, suggested that a protocol governing how Tony would undertake such a function should be established and considered by Council for approval.

Resolved to recommend to Council

- (1) That authority be granted to allow the Monitoring Officer to make minor alterations, additions, deletions and amendments to the Constitution.
- (2) That the Monitoring Officer's delegations be amended to reflect the change set out in recommendation (1).
- (3) That paragraph 4.02(a) of Article 4 of the Constitution be amended to permit the Monitoring Officer to undertake the functions set out in recommendation (1).

- (4) That Article 14 of the Constitution be amended to permit the Monitoring Officer to undertake the functions set out in recommendation (1).

The meeting terminated at 6.50 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: