

Standards Committee

Monday 26 January 2015 at 6.00 p.m.

at the Council House, Walsall

Present

Councillor Underhill (Chair)
Councillor Martin (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Andrew
Councillor Burley
Councillor E. Hazell
Councillor D. Shires
Councillor Sohal
Councillor Young

In attendance

Dr. A. Sen
Mr. A. Green

66/15 Apology

An apology for non-attendance was received on behalf of Councillor Murray

67/15 Substitutions

Councillor Sohal substituted for Councillor Murray.

68/15 Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 October July, 2014, copies having been previously circulated to each Member of the Committee, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

69/15 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

70/15 Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)

There were no items for consideration in private session.

71/15 Training for elected members 2015/16

The report of the Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer was submitted:

(see annexed)

The Committee considered proposals for Member training during 2015/16.

The Head of Democratic Services, Mr. J. Garner, explained the historical training that had been available to members and highlighted the induction programme for new Members that was planned for May 2015. He noted that a modest budget for Member training was available and this would be utilised to deliver highly relevant topics such as safeguarding training.

The Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager, Mr. Picken, highlighted the work the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel was undertaking with vulnerable young people and the importance of appropriate training for Members undertaking sensitive pieces of work.

The Interim Executive Director, Social Care and Inclusion, Mr. Skerman, noted that adult safeguarding was to move on to a statutory footing. Training in this area would need to be developed.

Members were pleased with the programme as set out along with the proposals for safeguarding training for children and adults. Training for new Members was seen as vital as the Council was such a large and complex organisation. With this in mind it was important to ensure that new Members were not overwhelmed with information.

A discussion took place on whether training could be made mandatory but it was noted that without any available sanctions to compel members to attend this would be difficult to enforce.

A Member commented that often training courses for Members could be poorly attended and it was suggested that training could be delivered at the beginning of meetings to improve attendance, however, it was noted that not all meetings would have capacity to deliver this.

As well as training on known hot issues it was suggested that Members receive training on questioning and interviewing techniques in order to be able to identify and uncover the hot issues of the future. A Member noted that reviewing complaints data was useful for this purpose.

It was suggested that training courses be set up with a mix of attendees such as Members, officers and service users so each party could learn from each other.

It was thought a Members' library of important books and documents could be established.

A discussion took place on an information session that had previously taken place to inform prospective Councillors on how the Council operated.

Resolved

That the suggestions for Member training made by the Committee be taken into account when finalising the training programme for 2015/16.

72/15 Member Disclosure and Barring Service checks

The report of the Interim Director Social Care and Inclusion was submitted:

(see annexed)

The Committee considered options for member participation in safeguarding children and adults. This included training and undertaking Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

The Interim Executive Director, Social Care and Inclusion, Mr. Skerman, explained that in the aftermath of failings in safeguarding in recent Council and national abuse enquiries it was timely for the Council to consider the various options regarding training and DBS checks for members. His report (annexed) suggested that Members in key positions undertook voluntary training and DBS checks. He noted that the suggestions were not a panacea but they would add additional safeguards.

Members explored the safeguards that would be gained by undertaking the additional voluntary checks and training and on balance felt that these additional safeguards would be of benefit to all Members of the Council not just those on specific Committees relating to children and vulnerable adults. The role of every Member put them in regular contact with these groups.

It was **moved** by Councillor Young and seconded by Councillor Burley:

That all Members are subjected to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks with any fee required paid for by the individual undergoing the check.

A number of Members disagreed that individuals should fund the cost of the DBS check themselves.

Amendment moved by Councillor Andrew and seconded by Councillor Sohal:

That all members are subjected to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared carried and it was:

Resolved to recommend to Council

That all Members are subjected to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

73/15 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 21 April 2015.

The meeting terminated at 7.15 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: