

Standards Committee

Monday 22 October, 2018 at 6.00 p.m.

at the Council House, Walsall

Present

Councillor S. Samra (Chair)

Councillor A. Underhill (Vice Chair)

Councillor P. Bott

Councillor R. Burley

Councillor S. Craddock

Councillor M. Follows (substitute for Councillor A. Andrew)

Councillor J. Murray

Councillor M. Statham

Councillor A. Young

Mr. Javed Iqbal – Head of Law (Contentious)

Mr. Tom Walker, Head of Customer Services Transformation

Ms Javinder Kaur – Digital Content Officer

Ms Harprit Dilbeher – Digital Content Officer

Mrs Bev Mycock, Democratic Services Officer

48/18 Apologies

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor A. Andrew, Councillor A. Ditta and Mr. A. Green, Independent Person.

49/18 Substitutions

Councillor M. Follows substituted for Councillor A. Andrew for the duration of the meeting.

50/18 Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes as circulated.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 April, 2018 copies having been previously circulated to each Member of the Committee, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of Councillor A. Young in attendance.

51/18 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

52/18 Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)

There were no items for consideration in private session.

53/18 Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) – Annual Review 2017/18

The Head of Law (Contentious) introduced the report on behalf of the Assurance Officer, which provided Members of the Committee with details relating to the role of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, and provided information on the number and range of complaints referred to by the Ombudsman to the Council during the financial year 2017/18, and submitted the Ombudsman's annual letter for 2017/18 for Committee's consideration.

The Head of Law (Contentious) reported that there had been 72 complaints received by the LGSCO relating to the Council in 2017/18 of which the highest number of complaints related to education and children's services and adult care services. Nine of the complaints were subject to detailed investigation of which three were dismissed and six upheld. Members requested further information in relation to the seriousness of the six complaints upheld. The Head of Law advised he had no further information at that time and would therefore request the information from the Assurance Team and forward to Committee Members.

There then followed a period of questioning by Members to the Head of Law with regards to the report, which included whether Walsall's complaints were on par with other local authorities and what was the bigger picture of all complaints. In response, the Head of Law confirmed the number of complaints were on par with other local authorities and when taken into prospective, only 6 complaints upheld for a population of over a 1/4 million residents

A query was raised in relation to whether lessons had been learnt from the complaints received. The Assurance Officer reported that in most some areas, statutory complaints created formal learning and he further added that the Local Government Ombudsman also completed focused reports where trends emerged across the country.

A Member enquired as to why a number of reports had been included on the agenda for noting only. In response, the Head of Law confirmed that the Standards Committee had to be formally advised of certain items to ensure probity and good governance

Resolved

- i. That further information be provided to Committee Members pertaining to the six complaints which had been upheld;
- ii. Committee noted the report.

54/18 Recent Case Review of a Standards Issues

The Head of Law (Contentious) introduced the report on behalf of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services. The report provided information to Elected Members of a recently decided case in respect of a standard's issue whereby the matter had to be determined in the High Court. He added that the proceedings followed were similar to how Walsall would review any conduct issues but following the High Court findings of the case in question, Senior Officers would have to advise Members on current law and quote the Ledbury Case.

Resolved

That the report be noted

55/18 Annual Updated Elected Member Development 2017/18

The Head of Law (Contentious) introduced the report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, which provided Elected Members with information in respect of the implementation of the refreshed learning and development programme offered to Members during the 2017/18 municipal year.

Members considered the report further and a number of comments and suggestions were raised which included:-

- concerns pertaining to the poor attendance figures for most of the learning events and what sanctions could be taken;
- whether a matrix should be produced of elected Members training attendances per annum;
- better induction training required for all Members, particularly with regard to Notices of Motion and Rules of Debate;
- differing opinions regarding mandatory training – have to be mindful of and put into prospective elected Members other 'outside of the Council' activities, cannot attend all training and should be down to the respective Member to determine which training is most beneficial and pertinent to their roles;
- some Committee training should be provided on a regular basis as policies change, for example Planning Committee, as opposed to only one session at the start of a municipal year

Resolved

- i. Comments to be fed back to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services;
- ii. That the report be noted.

56/18 Update Regarding the Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Process Review

The Head of Customer Services Transformation introduced the report to update Members on the review of the Council's approach to Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy and its accompanying procedures, following Members request at the previous Committee of 9th July, 2018, and he provided an update on the progress of the review and next steps.

The Head of Customer Services and Transformation also gave a detailed presentation to Members which included:-

Feedback forwarded to CMT from last meeting:

- lack of consistency in Council's approach to managing all feedback;
- complaints not responded to promptly nor feedback provided to Councillors when requests made;
- joined up approach required from all partners;
- all officers should include contact details on Council's People finder

How Walsall Council has Progressed

- Good Practice Guidance provided to all staff in relation to telephone and officer cover, Councillor Enquiries, Email Signatures, Owning an Enquiry, Working from Home and People Finder;
- A monthly officer working group held since the review commenced;
- Two Digital Content Officers recently appointed to improve online content;
- Business case agreed to implement an upgraded case management solution Respond

Next Steps

- Corporate web pages – action plan to improve content;
- 1/3 busiest page is 'Contact Us' as residents unable to navigate around the website;
- Delivery Councillor Enquiry website;
- Implement new enabling technology to help improve the website experience for residents;
- Ensure all staff are aware of / training to use the new policies and website;
- Everyone to receive the same level of service by following clear guidelines and indicative time scales;
- Portals to log complaints / Councillor file management systems;
- A lot of work to be done and Walsall must have the commitment to enable investment into digital technology.

What are the most frequent enquiries received by Councillors via email and in surgeries

- Housing and whg problems and ongoing issues around trying to get through to whg officers

- Pot holes
- Parking – residential parking outside homes/HMOs
- Community protection
- Lighting
- Schools places – not offered 1st choice and advice on the next steps parents can take
- time taken to answer telephone calls

The Head of Customer Services Transformation also highlighted a number of the new features on Walsall’s website, which included a ‘Where I Live’ button which provided residents with varied information regarding Ward Councillor details, schools, GP surgeries, bin collections, etc. all pertinent to the respective user’s submitted post code and he stated that Walsall Council should be ‘Digital by Design’ and not ‘Digital by Default’, as currently 50% of visits to the website are via mobile phones.

Resolved

That Standards Committee:-

- noted the contents of the report
- agreed to the next steps of the review
- agreed to receive the draft Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy at the next meeting.

57/18 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next is 29 January, 2019.

58/18 Termination of Meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 8.10 p.m.

Chair:

Date:.....