

## **Standards Committee**

**Monday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2018 at 6.00 p.m.**

**at the Council House, Walsall**

### **Present**

Councillor S. Samra (Chair)  
Councillor A. Underhill (Vice Chair)  
Councillor R. Burley  
Councillor S. Craddock  
Councillor J. Murray  
Councillor M. Statham  
Councillor W. Rasab (substitute)  
Mr. A. Green Independent Member

### **39/18 Apologies**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor A. Andrew.

### **40/18 Substitutions**

Councillor W. Rasab substituted for Councillor Andrew for the duration of the meeting.

### **41/18 Minutes**

The Committee considered the minutes of 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2018, as circulated.

### **Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2018, as copy having been previously circulated to each Member of the Committee, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the amendment of the last sentence of paragraph 36/18 to read:- 'Individuals affected by the use of the procedure were able to refer the decision to the Ombudsman, however Mr. Sen suggested that the Ombudsman was not objective'.

In response to a query regarding the Independent Member vacancy, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that a joint advert with another local authority would be advertised in the near future, with the aim of creating a 'pool' of trained, Independent Members.

### **42/18 Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**43/18 Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items for consideration in private session.

**44/18 Review of Elected Member Complaints 2017/18**

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report which provided information to Elected Members in respect of complaints he had received in his role as Monitoring Officer, concerning allegations made about breaches of the Council Code of Conduct by Elected Members during the 2017/18 municipal year.

(see annexed)

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services reported that during the 2017/18 municipal year, he had investigated only 4 complaints which had alleged that elected Members had breached the Council Code of Conduct, compared to 7 complaints the previous municipal year. He provided a brief overview of the complaints and advised Committee the complaints had been resolved without the need to recommend the establishment of a Standards Hearing Committee. With regards to two complaints arising out of an alleged misuse of social media, he advised that an Elected Member Development Plan had been produced, which would include guidance for all Members and ensure they complete mandatory information governance training every year.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services stated the report was positive and a testament to the elected Members in Walsall and that it clearly reflected their good behaviour and conduct.

A query was raised with regards to whether Standards Committee should be made aware of all complaints against Members, particularly with regards to repeat complaints against any one Member. In response, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services said he understood Members concerns and their wish to receive additional information but in the majority of cases under investigation, there had been no breach of the code of conduct, regardless of the number of complaints received, and in those instances, in his role as Monitoring Officer, he worked with Group Leaders and dependent upon the actual complaint, training was advised where it was deemed necessary.

**Resolved**

That the report be noted.

**45/18 Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Process Review**

The Head of Customer Service Transformation introduced the report, which had been prepared in response to Members' request from Standards Committee on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2018 to provide an update regarding proposals for the Council's Transformation Programme and to review to Council's approach to Complaints, Comments and Compliments.

(see annexed)

The Head of Customer Service Transformation gave a presentation based upon a summarised version of the report, following which he asked Members for their comments and queries, which included the following:-

- Consistency of the process within the authority was paramount;
- Council switchboard response;
- Lack of acknowledgement from Officers following a Councillor's query with the consequence that Councillors are unable to provide definitive timeframes to their constituents;
- Establish better communication links between the Council and partner agencies - endeavour to find more productive ways of working, ie. named officers for responses;
- A minimum policy should be adopted and adhered to Council wide for both statutory and none statutory issues;
- All officers should include their contact details / telephone number on the Council's People Finder;
- All officers to receive training when the Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Process Review completed to ensure everyone fully conversant;
- Potential for a SLA to ensure immediate acknowledgement, minimum holding response time then full response time deadlines;
- Member resources to be included within the review.

*Councillor Burley and Murray left at this juncture of the meeting.*

In response to the comments made, the Head of Customer Service Transformation thanked Members for their comments and acknowledged the need for one system that would work for all and he responded to some of the Members' comments as follows:-

- Switchboard important area of focus as first port of call to the Council. Walsall Council received over 120,000 telephone calls per calendar month - twice the number of calls received by neighbouring Wolverhampton Authority. This had been acknowledged as due in part to Walsall's 'low digital offer' and Walsall to recruit two dedicated website officers to enable customer self service through a more simplified, centralised 'point of entry' into the Council, providing additional on-line guidance and automatic acknowledgement receipts;

- Good practice in certain sections of the authority could be duplicated within the procedure, albeit some sections will inevitably have slower response times by their very nature of working operations, ie. children’s services;
- Will look into the reasons why contact telephone numbers are not included for all officers on the Council’s ‘People Finder’;
- Will work strategically with all partner agencies;
- Need to improve efficiencies using existing resources;

The Head of Customer Service Transformation added that all comments raised would be explored within the review.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed the Committee that training was available to all Members in relation to protocols and to the Code of Conduct and he added the Council also ensured all officers received and were fully aware of the ‘Code of Conduct for Council Employees’.

Standards Committee considered the report further and it was **moved** by Councillor Craddock and **seconded** by Councillor Underhill: -

**Resolved (unanimously)**

That Standards Committee:-

- i. noted the contents of the report
- ii. approved the request to return to the next Standards Board to provide a further update on the progress of the review
- iii. requested that all Council Officers to ensure their full contact details are included on both People Finder and email accounts. When officers are responding to Councillor enquiries or complaints, an indication of an expected response time (in days) must be included. Members also requested that whg be asked to follow the same procedure regarding Councillor queries.

**46/18 Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was scheduled for 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2018.

**47/18 Termination of Meeting**

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.25 p.m.

Chair: .....

Date: .....