

Standards Committee

Monday 21 July, 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

at the Council House, Walsall

Present

Councillor Underhill (Chairman)
Councillor Andrew
Councillor Burley
Councillor Clews
Councillor E. Hazell
Councillor Murray
Councillor D. Shires
Councillor Worrall

In attendance

Dr. A. Sen (independent person)

52/14 Welcome

The Chairman welcomed members to the first meeting of the Committee in 2014/15 especially those new to the Committee and/or the Council.

53/14 Apologies

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

54/14 Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 April, 2014, copies having been previously circulated to each member of the Committee, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

55/14 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest

56/14 Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)

There were no items for consideration in the private session.

57/14 Standards cases of interest

A report was submitted:

(see annexed)

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein.

Resolved

- (1) That the report and appendices be noted.
- (2) That the report be disseminated as part of a further briefing note to elected members.

58/14 Update on enquiries from Constituent report

A report was submitted:

(see annexed)

The Head of Democratic Services presented the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein.

Arising from discussion on this item, a member suggested that the third bullet point on page 1 of the guidance should be amended to read "scrutinising the decision making process" rather than "supporting the decision making process".

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services agreed to make this amendment. In addition, he agreed to reword the first paragraph on page 2 where it read "by providing the services" as members did not directly provide services.

In particular, a discussion ensued relating to the difficulty one member had experienced at a recent meeting of the Planning Committee. He had found it challenging on a particular case where he knew detailed information on the application and he had felt uneasy in challenging officers because he was not sure how to address the matter in view of the fact that he had declared a non-pecuniary interest.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services agreed to speak with planning officers and produce some specific member guidance around Planning Committee matters.

The independent person suggested that paragraph (5) on page 7 should be reworded to read “to ensure effective communication through the use of such things as technology”.

Members commented that the old Council diary was very useful and provided members with a significant amount of information which helped them fulfil their roles as elected members.

Resolved

- (1) That subject to the amendments identified above being made the report and appendices be noted.
- (2) That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services liaise with planning officers and provide some specific guidance to members around Planning Committee matters.

59/14 Review of elected member complaints 2013/14

A report was submitted:

(see annexed)

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein.

The Committee discussed member behaviour and conduct particularly relating to Planning Committee and at meetings of the Council.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services agreed to send a letter to all members of the Council reminding them of their obligations under the members' code of conduct.

In addition, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services raised the matter of the vacant independent person position on the Committee and sought the Committee's approval to make an appointment to the position. The Committee supported this course of action.

The Chair referred to the letter which had been sent out to all members of the Committee with the agenda seeking any items they wished to add to the Committee's work programme for 2014/15.

Members made the following suggestions:

- Council diary whether or not it was viable to produce
- Blackberry training

Resolved

- (1) That the report and appendices be noted.
- (2) That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services write to all members of the Council reminding them of their obligations under the Code of Conduct.
- (3) That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services make an appointment to vacant position of independent person.

The meeting terminated at 6.50 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: