

Standards Committee

Monday 2nd October 2017 at 6.00 p.m.

at the Council House, Walsall

Present

Councillor Underhill (Chair)
Councillor M. Bird
Councillor R. Burley
Councillor K. Chambers
Councillor E. Hazell
Councillor R. Martin
Councillor G. Perry
Councillor T. Wilson

11/18 Apologies

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor A. Ditta, Councillor G. Sohal, Councillor J. Murray, and Councillor A. Andrew.

12/18 Substitutions

The following substitutions were received for the duration of the meeting;

- Councillor G. Perry for Councillor J. Murray
- Councillor T. Wilson for Councillor G. Sohal
- Councillor M. Bird for Councillor A. Andrew

13/18 Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17th July 2017, copies having been previously circulated to each Member of the Committee, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

14/18 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

15/18 Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)

There were no items for consideration in private session.

16/18 **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review 2016/17**

The Committee considered information on the number and range of complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) about the Council during 2016/17.

The Assurance Officer reported that there were 79 complaints about the Council to the LGO in 2016/17. 28 of the complaints were subject to detailed investigation. 14 of which were upheld and 14 were dismissed. The highest number of complaints related to education and children's services. However a large number of these were returned for local resolution. Of the 14 complaints upheld, 4 related to adult social care, 1 to benefits, 3 to education and children's services, 1 to environmental services, 2 to housing, and 3 to planning.

A Member queried how lessons were learnt in relation to complaints received. The Assurance Officer stated that in some areas statutory complaints created formal learning. The Local Government Ombudsman also completed focused reports where trends emerged across the country.

An Independent Member observed that Walsall received a higher number of complaints than its Black Country neighbours. The Assurance Officer was asked what proportion of the total number of complaints received had also complained to the local government ombudsman. The Assurance Officer stated that this could be taken to a future meeting.

It was noted that lessons learnt by the Council in relation to complaints needed to be embedded. The Monitoring Officer raised a point about serial complainants and that the Council had a duty to deal with such individuals.

Resolved

That

- 1. The report be noted;**
- 2. A report on complaints to the Council was taken to a future meeting of the Committee.**

17/18 **Social Media Training and Guidelines for Elected Members**

The report provided Members with an update relating to recent training provided to elected members concerning use of social media and to confirm the council has already adopted social media guidelines which are contained within the constitution at part 5.21. The training attended by Members was held up as good practice by the recent peer review team.

Members discussed the dangers of social media and the implications of elected members not being trained on this topic. It was agreed that everyone should attend this training.

In response to the guidelines presented an Independent Member questioned whether it was ever appropriate for an elected member to use a mobile device in

a council meeting. He questioned how the public would know if the use was necessary. The Monitoring Officer acknowledged the concerns of the Independent Member and suggested that there were occasions where mobile devices needed to be used and there was an expectation that meetings would become paperless in the future. It was also clarified that the use of social media via a Council owned device did not pose a risk to the Council if guidelines were breached but to the individual using social media.

Members suggested that the code of conduct was amended to ensure that it was a requirement for Members to complete 12 hours of training each municipal year. It was also suggested that the term personal development was preferable to training.

Resolved

That:-

- 1. To note the content of the report.**
- 2. To endorse the Monitoring Officer sending a copy of the Social Media Protocol for Councillors to all Councillors together with a copy of the presentation.**

18/18 Review of cases of interest and proposed changes to the disqualification Criteria for Councillors

The Monitoring Officer stated that the report was to provide Members of the Committee with an update relating to recent cases of interest and proposed changes to the Disqualification Criteria for Councillors under the Local Government Act 1972, section 80. The Committees attention was drawn to the disqualification criteria for Councillors and Mayors consultation published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in September 2017.

The case between Hussain and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council was considered by the Committee. It was highlighted that there could be a cost to the council and elected members when governance was not adhered to. It was also noted that in Walsall it would be very unlikely that a similar situation would occur due to the political situation and the committee system that was in place. A Member stressed the importance of the ability of employees to whistle blow and make a complaint.

An Independent Member stressed the importance of training newer members of staff on the political nature of the organisation.

Resolved

That a report on the response from DLCG will be taken back to the Committee at a future meeting.

19/18 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 2nd October 2017.

20/18 Termination of Meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 6.50 p.m.

Chair:

Date: