

Standards Committee

Monday 17 July 2023 at 6.00pm.

In a Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall

Members Present

Councillor Martin (Chair)
Councillor Burley (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Bashir
Councillor Follows
Councillor Lee
Councillor Sears
Councillor Jukes

Independent Persons Present

Ms. D. Mardner
Mr. A. Green

Officers Present

Mr A. Cox	-	Director of Governance
Ms S. Lloyd	-	Democratic Services Officer
Mr C. Goodall	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Allen, Andrew and Nazir and Mr. C. Magness.

2. Substitutions

Councillor Jukes substituted for Councillor Nazir.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)

There were no items for consideration in private session.

5. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meetings held 12 April 2023, a copy having being circulated in advance, be approved as a correct record.

6. **Member DBS Check Update**

The Principal Democratic Services Officer presented a report which provided the Committee with details of the outcome of an independent review into the Disclosure and Barring Service and the latest data available on Members' DBS checks in Walsall.

He began by highlighting that the independent review commissioned by the Home Office had noted inconsistencies in the approach of local authorities with regards to DBS checks and that there was currently no legal requirement for councillors to complete such a check. He further stated that the report recommended that such a requirement be brought in and that any councillors forming part of a committee that deals with vulnerable adults or children undertake the relevant enhanced DBS check.

The Democratic Services Officer then presented the latest data available on the uptake of DBS checks by Councillors, highlighting that there had been a significant improvement from 29 to 48 Members who had completed a DBS check. She confirmed that this meant there were 11 Members for whom the council did not have a record of a DBS check within the last four years. Members also discussed the annual declarations as a positive declaration by a councillor and a safeguard and requested that the policy be checked to ascertain the frequency with which these were to be completed.

Members of the Committee expressed their views that all councillors should undertake an enhanced DBS check and that they would support steps being taken to encourage those who had not yet completed their checks to do so.

Resolved

That:

- 1. The report be noted;**
- 2. A recommendation be made to Full Council that Councillors involved in decisions on the provision of services for vulnerable adults undertake an enhanced DBS Check.**
- 3. A report to return to the Committee at their next meeting and also following the Government response to the recommendations in the independent review;**

4. **The Monitoring Officer investigate the possibility of the creation of a list of all Members' DBS and Annual Declaration statuses on the council website, subject to this not being deemed to be in contravention of data protection legislation;**
5. **The Chair of Standards Committee write to Group Leaders to encourage members of their group to complete DBS checks if they have not done so already and to inform them that the Monitoring Officer has been requested by the Committee to investigate the possibility of publishing a list of all Members' DBS and Annual Declaration statuses;**
6. **The Monitoring Officer write to the 11 outstanding Members to encourage them to complete a relevant DBS check.**

7. **Elected Members Training**

The Committee received a report in relation to training available to Councillors. It was highlighted that it was hoped that training champions within the political groups would be able to encourage and support other councillors to complete such learning and development that was necessary or beneficial. The Director of Governance also stated that he would hold focus groups with members to ask them what training they would find beneficial to identify any gaps that there may be in the current programme.

Following questions from the Committee the Director of Governance confirmed that records were kept of training that had been completed and it was possible for councillors to submit details of relevant training that had been completed in other areas, for example in their professions or through voluntary roles. He undertook to return to the next meeting of the Standards Committee with further details on the training budget and the monitoring of the minimum 12 hours of training for Councillors per municipal year.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

8. **Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

The Director of Governance presented a report in relation to disclosable pecuniary interests, highlighting that as Monitoring Officer he maintained the register required under the Localism Act 2011. He outlined the legislation and requirements relating to disclosure of pecuniary interests and suggested the creation of a working group to review the council's current system and the guidance and training provided.

Members of the Committee expressed their commitment to ensuring that this process is monitored, suggesting that perhaps an annual declaration could be introduced as a means of ensuring information is kept up to date.

Resolved

That:

- 1. The report be noted; and**
- 2. A working party to review the current registration system and the guidance and training given to Councillors in respect of the same be established to consist of the following Members:**
 - a. Councillors Burley, Follows, Bashir and Independent Persons Ms D. Mardner and Mr A. Green.**

9. Promoting High Standards of Conduct

The Director of Governance gave a verbal update on the promotion of high standards of conduct, noting that all Councillors had been asked if they had any items they wished Standards Committee to review and the responses received corresponded directly to items that were already included on the work programme for the Committee. He also suggested that should Members find this beneficial the quarterly Standards newsletter could be reinstated.

10. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be 2 October 2023.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 7.05pm.

Chair

Date