

Standards Committee

17th July 2017 at 6.00 p.m.

at the Council House, Walsall

Present

Councillor Underhill (Chair)
Councillor A. Andrews
Councillor R. Burley
Councillor K. Chambers
Councillor A. Ditta
Councillor E. Hazell
Councillor R. Martin
Councillor J. Murray

1/18 Apologies

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Dr A. Sen, Mr. A. Green and Councillor G. Sohal.

2/18 Substitutions

There were no substitutions.

3/18 Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25th April 2017, copies having been previously circulated to each Member of the Committee, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4/18 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5/18 Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)

There were no items for consideration in private session.

6/18 DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) Checks for Members

The Committee considered a report on DBS checks for Members (annexed).

The Head of Legal & Democratic Services stated that the report had been produced at the request of Members and its purpose was to update the Committee on progress. An audit undertaken by HRD revealed that a significant number of elected members already had full DBS checks as a result of the external roles they fulfil. The next stage would be for Officers to meet with Group Leaders.

A discussion ensued in relation to the ability to passport DBS checks. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services stated that where Members already held a DBS check it may be that they were able to make a 'self declaration'. He stated that he would gain clarity and report back to Members.

Resolved

That; -

- 1. The report be noted;**
- 2. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services gains clarity on the ability to passport DBS checks.**

7/18 Member Development

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services updated the Committee on recent activity to re-establish a Member Development Programme. It was hoped that the refreshed training programme would assist Elected Members in their role. It was stressed that the programme was in draft form and could be amended following comments from Elected Members. It was anticipated that the programme would be launched in August 2017 and would be reviewed on an annual basis.

Members suggested that the Local Government Association (LGA) courses were also fed into the programme as the organisation provided training courses which complimented the internal courses.

The Committee discussed those training sessions which should be mandatory and it was acknowledged that although there were no sanctions for non attendance it could preclude Members from participating in certain Committees. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that all Members were able to attend all training courses regardless of their status as 'mandatory' or not.

Elected Members complimented the programme and suggested that the terminology of some of the courses needed revising. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services agreed to revise this.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services suggested that political groups could have learning champions as they were best placed to support their Members going forward. He also stated that to be effective the training would have to suit the needs of Members in the future. It was also suggested that the Standards Committee was an appropriate placed to review training for Elected Members.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

8/18 Review of Elected Member Complaints

The Committee were provided with information in respect of complaints received by the Monitoring Officer concerning allegations made about breaches of the Council Code of Conduct by Members during 2016/17.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services reported that during 2016/17 he had investigated 7 allegations against Councillors for breaches of the Code of Conduct. He explained that he had not found it necessary to recommend the establishment of a Standards Hearing Committee for any of the complaints. The Independent Members on the Committee had provided helpful challenge and objectivity to his investigations. The Committee were advised that one of the complaints was raised against six Councillors and for the purpose of the report this was treated as one complaint because the complaints arose out of the same circumstances.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services stated that this was a positive report and it reflected the fact that Elected Members conducted themselves well in Walsall. Members of the Committee asked for their thanks to the Independent Members to be placed on record.

Resolved:

That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to write to the Independent Members to thank them for their contribution to the Committee.

9/18 Date of Next Meeting

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

10/18 Termination of Meeting

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

Chair:

Date: