

Standards Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Standards Committee held in Committee Room No.2 (Bad Münstereifel Room), Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **8th August 2013**

Present:

Cllr. Galpin (Chairman);
Cllr. Davison (Vice-Chairman);
Cllrs. Adby, Apps, Mrs Blanford, Chilton, Feacey, Mrs Hutchinson.

Mr D Lyward – Parish Council Representative.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Councillor Apps attended as Substitute Member for Councillor Taylor.

Apologies:

Cllr. Taylor, Monitoring Officer.

Also Present:

Mrs C Vant – Independent Person

Deputy Monitoring Officer, Senior Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

104 Election of Chairman for 2013/14 Municipal Year

Resolved:

That Councillor Galpin be elected as Chairman of the Standards Committee for the 2013/14 Municipal Year.

105 Election of Vice-Chairman for 2013/14 Municipal Year

Resolved:

That Councillor Davison be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Standards Committee for the 2013/14 Municipal Year.

106 Standards Committee – 1st November 2011

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 1st November 2011 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

107 Standards Committee Assessment Panels – 25th October 2011, 6th March 2012 and 21st June 2012.

(a) Standards Committee Assessment Panel 25th October 2011

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Committee Assessment Panel held on the 25th October 2011 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

(b) Standards Committee Assessment Panel 6th March 2012

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Committee Assessment Panel held on the 6th March 2012 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

(c) Standards Committee Assessment Panel 21st June 2012

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Committee Assessment Panel held on the 21st June 2012 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

108 Annual Report of the Council's Monitoring Officer 2012/13

The Chairman thanked Members for electing him as Chairman for the forthcoming year and asked for everyone around the table to introduce themselves. He briefly outlined the new Standards regime that had been introduced since the last Meeting of this Committee and the new role of Mrs Vant as the Independent Person.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the annual report to be presented to the Council on the 17th October 2013. He also tabled a paper which set out proposed amendments to the Code of Conduct as a result of typographical errors, and some minor drafting changes to the 'Arrangements' for the procedure on receipt of a complaint and the informal resolution procedure. The report gave an analysis of both Code of Conduct activity (Paragraphs 8-15) and Ombudsman Complaint activity (Paragraphs 16-18) for the period 20th July 2012 (the date the Council adopted a new Code of Conduct for Councillors) to 31st July 2013. The new Code of Conduct had made quite a significant difference to the investigation of complaints and, although it was fairly early days and there had been an initial state of flux, the process seemed to be working well.

With regard to Code of Conduct Complaints, there had been four new complaints this year and the outcome of one case carried forward from the 'old' regime under transitional provisions (two related to Borough Councillors and three to Parish Councillors). The figures for 2012/13 showed a reduction compared to the preceding two years under the old regime. Of the five cases in 2012/13, two had been referred for investigation. One of these had been resolved by a formal apology and there was a finding of no breach in the other.

In relation to Ombudsman Complaints the Monitoring Officer was aware of seven complaints against the Borough Council in 2012/13, a number which had significantly reduced from the previous two years (25 and 26 respectively). No complaints had been ruled as maladministration by this Council. Overall, therefore, the Council's record in relation to Ombudsman case outcomes remained strong.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer explained that it was well recognised that there needed to be formal training on the Code of Conduct for Members. This had initially been deferred pending ongoing discussions between the CLG and Local Government professional bodies seeking clarification about the scope of the new interest rules and other matters. Now that some limited experience of the Code's operation had been gained, the time was right to re-visit a joint training programme for Borough Councillors and Parish Councils. During discussion the Committee agreed that the Council's Member Training Panel should be involved in devising the make-up of the training session and that it would be vitally important to involve both Parish Councillors and Clerks as well as Borough Council Members.

In response to questions from a Member the Deputy Monitoring Officer explained what was meant by the Localism Act, the Good Practice Protocol for Councillors when Dealing with Planning Matters and the Kent Model Code of Conduct.

Resolved:

- That (i) **the Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer 2012/13 be received, noted and forwarded to Full Council for approval.**
- (ii) **in conjunction with the Member Training Panel, the Monitoring Officer should arrange some Code of Conduct training for Borough Councillors and Parish Councils as soon as possible.**

Recommended:

That the minor amendments to the Code of Conduct and the Arrangements referred to in Paragraph 8 of the report and the tabled paper be made.

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Danny Sheppard:
Telephone: 01233 330349 Email: danny.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk
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