

Standards Committee – Assessment Panel

Minutes of a Meeting of the Standards Committee – Assessment Panel held in Committee Room No.2 (Bad Münstereifel Room), Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **5th February 2010**

Present:

Mrs C Vant (Chairman);

Cllr. Mrs Hawes

Ms J Adams – Parish Council Representative

Also Present:

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

429 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Mrs Hawes declared a Code of Conduct Interest (Personal but not Prejudicial) as she had received the “All Councillor e-mail” referred to in case ABC/09/15.

430 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items, namely Initial Assessments ABC/09/15, ABC/09/16, ABC/09/17 and ABC/09/20.

431 Matter Referred for Initial Assessment – Case ABC/09/15

The Monitoring Officer had submitted his report which included a summary of the allegations. It explained that the complaint was in relation to two events, namely the sending of an email to all Councillors by a Borough Councillor which a small number of Councillors had taken exception to, and a subsequent alleged threat made from one Borough Councillor to another. The Panel considered the complaint and the evidence before it in the context of the adopted Assessment Criteria.

After considerable discussion on this matter it was: -

Resolved:

That the Assessment Panel concludes that whilst the conduct complained of may disclose a possible breach of the Code of Conduct, bearing in mind it occurred between Councillors, it was not sufficiently serious to warrant the cost of a publicly funded investigation. The Panel did however regard the issue of good Councillor relations as important and wished to make it clear to those involved that they encouraged respectful exchanges between Councillors and that they considered there were better ways for the Councillor to have raised the original issue of concern. The Panel referred the matter to the Monitoring Officer with a direction to take steps other than formal investigation, namely to send a letter to the subject Member in those terms.

432 Matters Referred for Initial Assessment – Cases ABC/09/16, ABC/09/17 and ABC/09/20

The Deputy Monitoring Officer had submitted his report which included a summary of the allegations. It explained that three separate complaints had been made by one Parish Councillor about potential breaches of the Code of Conduct by three fellow Parish Councillors. The circumstances surrounding all three complaints were similar and related to the same issue so they had been grouped together in a single report. The Panel considered the complaint and the evidence before it in the context of the adopted Assessment Criteria.

After considerable discussion on these matters it was: -

Resolved:

That with regard to cases ABC/09/16 and ABC/09/17, the Assessment Panel concluded that the conduct complained of may, if it occurred, disclose a possible breach of the Code of Conduct, but, even if it did occur, bearing in mind it occurred between Councillors, it was not sufficiently serious to warrant the cost of a publicly funded investigation. With regard to case ABC/09/20 the Panel concluded that the evidence did not disclose an apparent breach of the Code of Conduct. However, in all cases the Panel referred the matter to the Monitoring Officer with a direction to take steps other than formal investigation, namely to send a letter to the Parish Council expressing concern at the generation of complaints from the particular Parish Council and stating that it was clear there had been a break down in relationships in the Parish over this issue and asking if they considered there was anything the Monitoring Officer could do to assist in this matter. Now that this issue had been dealt with by the Borough Council's Executive the Panel hoped that the Parish Council would move on and work together in the future in the best interests of the village.