

Standards Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Standards Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **31st January 2017**.

Present:

Cllr. Dehnel (Chairman);
Cllr. Mrs Bell (Vice-Chairman)
Cllrs. Chilton, Mrs Dyer, Feacey, Hicks, Mrs Webb.

Mrs C Vant – Independent Person
Mr R Brasier – Parish Council Representative.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(iii) Councillor Mrs Webb attended as Substitute Member for Councillor Knowles.

Apology:

Cllr. Knowles.

Also Present:

Monitoring Officer, Senior Member Services Officer.

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The Chairman advised that actions from the last meeting regarding the review of governance arrangements at Chilham Parish Council and the appointment of a Deputy Monitoring Officer would be covered later in the meeting as part of the Annual Report. He also advised that the Committee's previous recommendation to make an addition to Article 2.03 (vi) of the Constitution regarding attendance at training events had been actioned.

The Committee then discussed the wider the topic of Member Training. The Chairman considered that the Standards Committee was generally a very reactive Committee and he would like it to be a bit more pro-active. Whilst the Committee did not determine the actual training programme and could only encourage attendance, he said he was interested in 'outputs' and what tools were necessary to enable a Councillor to display good standards in terms of probity, conduct and professionalism. Other Members said that it was important to properly equip Councillors to do their job and there was perhaps some scope to suggest that training on certain subjects was made compulsory for new Members. The Vice-Chairman said she had reservations about some of the proposals for training – both from the Member Training Panel and those mentioned at this meeting. She considered there was a danger of 'over-training' as Councillors were elected to represent their residents, and too much Officer led training could affect the flexibility and independence with which the role was undertaken. She would personally resist too much compulsory training. She understood that the Member Training Panel had

made its proposals, and they would now be considered by the Cabinet on the 9th February. The Committee noted that this whole subject was something that would need further discussion after consideration by the Cabinet although it was not directly in the remit of the Standards Committee.

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 25th January 2016 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

277 Annual Report of the Council's Monitoring Officer 2016

The Monitoring Officer introduced his annual report to be presented to the Council on the 16th February 2017. The report assessed activity in probity matters, in particular in relation to formal complaints about alleged breaches of protocols and codes of conduct by Borough and Parish Councillors for the calendar year 2016. The report also included data on Ombudsman complaints as these were also handled by the Monitoring Officer and his staff. The relevant period related to the most recent data provided by the Ombudsman, namely 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016. He said that the report was a pleasing one to present with very little negative activity.

With regard to Code of Conduct Complaints, there had been no new complaints made this year. Three cases were referred to in the report – two had been carried over from last year and determined this year whilst one, albeit on the required complaint form, was in effect a complaint about service delivery. The complainant was therefore advised to pursue it as a service complaint. In relation to Ombudsman Complaints the Monitoring Officer said there had been eight resolved by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) which was a reduction on the previous year. Only two of these complaints had been upheld and only one had been ruled as maladministration with injustice.

Whilst Code of Conduct complaint activity in Ashford remained low, the Monitoring Officer said it was also worth drawing attention to matters relating to declarations of interest, the Council's constitution and Member training, all of which were outlined in the report. He also updated on the independent review of governance undertaken at Chilham Parish Council which had seen a pleasing outcome. The problems that had beset the previous Parish Council appeared to have been resolved and they had moved from an extremely dysfunctional Council to one which operated effectively and efficiently. With regard to the appointment of a Deputy Monitoring Officer he advised that the previous post holder had in fact returned on a part time basis up to Christmas 2016 so there had not been a need to make an appointment up until now. He would now look to appoint a Deputy(s) in the near future.

The Chairman said he wanted to echo the comments about Chilham Parish Council. As Ward Member for the area he had seen the Parish Council move from dysfunctional to outstanding in the last 18 months. There had been a total replacement of the previous membership and they had got their act together, were producing good quality work and the local community were happy. The output of the

independent review and subsequent action plan should also be acknowledged. He encouraged all Members to make every effort to attend the Parish Council meetings in their Wards.

The Chairman considered that the low number of complaints received by and decided against the Council spoke a great deal about the quality of its Officers. The Committee agreed to record a vote of thanks and congratulations to the Officers of the Council for their quality and professionalism.

Resolved:

- That
- (i) the Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer 2016 be received, noted and forwarded to Full Council for approval.**
 - (ii) the Monitoring Officer continue to offer support and guidance to Chilham Parish Council in completion of the review of their action plan.**
 - (iii) the Committee record a vote of thanks to the Council's Officers for the low number of complaints received which, in the Committee's view, reflected the quality and professionalism of the Council's staff.**
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