

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY 9 JULY 2014

Held at 5.30 pm in Committee Room 1, Civic Centre, Pavilion Road, West Bridgford

PRESENT:

Councillors R A Adair (Chairman), A MacInnes, B A Nicholls

Independent Members: W A Wood

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

J R Baggaley Independent Person

OFFICERS PRESENT:

P Cox Senior Solicitor

V Nightingale Senior Member Support Officer

D Swaine Executive Manager - Operations and Corporate

Governance and Monitoring Officer

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Councillors G Davidson, J E Fearon, J E Greenwood, G Norbury, K White

1. Declarations of Interest

There were none declared.

2. Notes of the Previous Meeting

The notes of the meeting held on Wednesday 15 January 2014 were accepted as a true record.

3. Annual Review - Cases

The Monitoring Officer presented a report which outlined the number of cases that had been received during 2013 and 2014. He reminded Members that a new code had been introduced in June 2012, which had been reviewed in 2013. Council on 26 September 2013 had considered the review and agreed to amend the Code to include the necessity for Members to declare if they were a member of a Trade Union.

With regard to the cases, there had been 12 during the year. The Monitoring Officer explained that the majority of these had been referred to the Independent Person, however, a small number had not as they primarily related to Council services and not the conduct of the Member. It was recognised that complainants did not often refer to actual breaches of the Code but how they perceived people's actions to be contrary to the Code. Five of the cases referred to one parish council and only one case, which related to a non-declaration of a pecuniary interest, had been referred to the Police. The Committee was informed that there was a Nottinghamshire protocol with the

Police, which designated a specific police officer as a contact point. In respect of the case that had been referred to the Police the Committee was informed that no further action was taken. The Committee felt that it had taken quite some time to finalise this complaint but accepted that the Police had to prioritise cases.

The Committee reviewed the cases and discussed if there was a need for any further training. It was felt that Borough Councillors had received sufficient training and that this should be included again within the induction programme following the 2015 elections.

Councillor MacInnes stated that as a member of the Labour Party he was required, on an annual basis, to sign that he understood the Code and would abide by it. The Senior Solicitor informed Members that the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which had been critical of the changes in the regime and its effectiveness, had surveyed various bodies in respect of how ethical standards were embedded within their culture. Following this guidance would be produced for members of public bodies.

With regard to parish councils the Committee was informed that the new Code had been a topic at a Parish Forum in 2012. Members felt that it was important that parish councillors understood how their actions could be perceived and how this related to the Code. The Committee felt that, in the future, training should be offered to parish chairmen, vice chairmen and clerks. It was also important to point out that whether the parish councillor was elected or co-opted the Code applied to them.

Following a question, the Monitoring Officer explained that he had previously written to every parish informing them of the changes to the Code. He stated that there was a good relationship with the parishes and that he, or the Senior Solicitor, could be contacted for advice. He reminded the Committee that under the old regime the Standards Board for England had issued guidance notes for Committee members. It was agreed that training should be an item on the Committee's January agenda. At that meeting the Monitoring Officer would provide training on what constituted a breach of the Code using the Standards Board's training video, some of which was still relevant.

The Committee acknowledged that the new regime was less burdensome than the previous one and that it was working well.

The meeting closed at 6.05 pm.