

MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
MONDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2019

Held at 7.00 pm in the Committee Room 1, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road, West
Bridgford

PRESENT:

Councillors S Bailey (Chairman), A Brennan, N Clarke, T Combellack,
S Mallender

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

K White (Independent Member) on a conference call

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

T Coop

Democratic Services Officer

S Sull

Monitoring Officer

APOLOGIES:

Councillors L Howitt

J Baggaley (Independent Person), S Nelken and A Wood

7 Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 July 2019

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2019 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

New Councillor's to Standards Committee questioned the procedural and administration functions of the Committee and in particular, how the independent members are selected.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the independent members of the Committee were selected as a mix of Parish Councillor's and Clerks and members of the public. There is also an Independent Person, who provides support to the Monitoring Officer on standards matters.

The Monitoring Officer explained that when a vacancy for an independent member arises and in the recent example where a Parish Clerk had resigned, the Monitoring Officer contacted the Town and Parish Council's and provided them with information of the vacancy and a job description for the role. The Monitoring Officer received six applications, from these six applications three applicants were invited for interview by the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer.

Kerry White advised that she applied for her position as an Independent Member of the Public in response to a job advertisement the Council had placed in the local newspaper.

8 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest reported.

9 **Cases and Work Update**

The Monitoring Officer provided a report that updated the Committee on complaints received. Since the implementation of the existing standards regime (from the 1 July 2012), there have been a total of 69 cases. Details of these cases have been periodically reported to the Committee. Since the Committee's last meeting on 1 July 2019 nine further complaints had been received regarding alleged breaches of the Councillor's Code of Conduct. Seven cases were reviewed by the Monitoring Officer and the complaints were rejected as not acceptable under the Code, one complaint was resolved locally and the other complaint is on hold pending internal determination of the issue by the Parish. All complaints have been considered by the Monitoring Officer giving due regard to the Councillor Complaint Procedure, and where appropriate the Independent Person has been consulted.

The Committee asked specific questions in relation to the number of standards complaints the Council had received and requested that more information be provided on the complainant, the nature of the complaints, whether the complaints were vexatious or was there a pattern or trend emerging? The Committee suggested that this information would be helpful in deciding whether specific training was required for Town and Parish Councillor's. Kerry White – Independent Member expressed that everyone has the right to complain and that care is needed if the Committee insisted on the names of complainants being recorded.

The Monitoring Officer agreed to provide more detailed information in respect of the nature of the complaint and advised the Committee that there were mechanisms in place to disregard vexatious complaints with guidance from the Independent Person. The Monitoring Officer advised the committee of the confidential nature of complaints and where they were rejected, the names of the subject members should not be referenced.

The Monitoring Officer suggested that the Committee could consider writing to Town and Parish Council's providing words of advice, or sign posting support if a trend in the nature of complaints is exposed.

Kerry White – Independent Member expressed her concerns with accessing the standards complaints procedure and online complaints form via the website, she explained that the Council's search engine did not pick up on obvious words that a member of the public may use when searching to complain.

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that most of the complaints she had received were being sent direct, although she was not aware of how the complainant had accessed the form.

The Committee suggested that a test is completed on the Council's search engine and improvements made to ensure public accessibility is improved.

Other Work

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that since its last meeting the Code of Conduct had been adopted by Council at its meeting in July 2019. The Monitoring Officer also advised Town and Parish Councils of the revision to the draft code of conduct, arrangements and Public Interest Test.

In addition, the Monitoring Officer reminded the Committee that at its meeting in July 2019, Council had also approved the adoption of the Best Practice Principals and that the Standards Committee is to consider the schedule in the appendix provided with the report. The Monitoring Officer asked the Committee to consider the suggested timescales for the adoption of the principals, adding that the Best Practice Principals could contribute to the Committees annual work programme.

The Chairman expressed that she was keen for the principals to be implemented by March 2020, adding that some of the principals were already being fulfilled. The Committee highlighted some issues in respect of the language expressed in some of the principals.

The Monitoring Officer explained that she would raise their concerns with her counterparts at other authorities and provide further information for the next meeting. The Monitoring Officer reminded the Committee however, that the principals had been adopted as worded.

The Monitoring Officer presented a revised Social Media Guide for the Committee to review and consider its adoption, adding that the guide is a fluid document and can be amended in line with new legislation or as and when social media trends develop and change.

The Chairman thanked the Monitoring Officer for the support she has provided to the Committee. In addition the Chairman expressed how encouraging it was to see that the Monitoring Officer is more accessible in supporting Town and Parish Council's in respect of the code and complaints procedure.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee notes the report
- b) The Committee approve the Social Media Guidance
- c) The Committee agree a work programme to review the implementation of the Best Practice Principals

ACTION SHEET - Standards Committee 23 September 2019

Minute	Action	Officer
9	Members of the committee requested that improvements are made to the search engine in respect of access to the	Monitoring Officer - to check with IT and test the web complaints procedure

	standards complaint form on the website	
9	Members were concerned at the language used in some of the Best Practice Principals and asked if this could be altered to reflect Boroughs practice	Monitoring Officer – to check with her counterparts at other authorities what they were adopting

The meeting closed at 8.11 pm.

CHAIRMAN