

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
4th December, 2015

Present:- Councillor Beck (in the Chair); Councillors Fleming, Hughes and Taylor, Parish Councillor D. Bates and also Mr. P. Edler, Ms. J. Porter and Mrs. C. Saltis.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alam, Beaumont, Finnie and Pitchley, Parish Councillor D. Rowley, Parish Councillor R. Swann, Ms. A. Dowdall Mr. P. Beavers and Mr. D. Roper-Newman.

27. FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STANDARDS WORKING GROUP

Consideration was given to a report which outlined the work undertaken by the Standards Working Group between 16th July and 19th November, 2015, in which it made several recommendations to update and introduce new procedures as well as increasing the profile of the Standards Committee.

It was hoped that these innovations would contribute to the development of healthier ethical standards within the Council as well as contributing to the corporate governance and improvement plan of the Council.

The Committee considered in detail at each of the numbered areas of the report and the appendices as part of the report, which had been circulated, in turn.

1. Standards Committee – Terms of Reference which were agreed whilst noting revisions Nos. 2, 11 and 19 by the Working Group.
2. Appendix 2 related to the ongoing development of the Standards Committee Work Plan which would be subject to change or addition should the need arise.
3. The Model Code of Conduct (Appendix 3) was part of the improvement Plan and included the supplement from Commissioner Sir Derek Myers “A Healthy System of Democratic Leadership and Accountability”. The Committee were in agreement with the Model Code and the supplement going forward to Council for adoption.
4. The strapline statement of purpose rather than the adoption of a mission statement was fully supported, which would be included at the top of the Terms of Reference.
5. The name change to be “Standards and Ethics Committee” was fully supported and best met the work and role of the Standards Committee moving forward.

6. The suggested mock up pages for the new website were welcomed and supported and needed to be as informative as possible for members of the public with clear explanations and links to the relevant documents.

It was also suggested that similar literature be placed in public places for those members of the public who were not computer literate and clearly communicated to Town and Parish Councils.

7. The Committee was happy to endorse the membership remaining as it was currently, but wished to ensure the hearing panels were increased in number and were strengthened to include:-

One majority party elected member of the Borough Council
One minority party elected member of the Borough Council
One Parish Councillor
Two Independent Co-opted Members.

of which the Chair of the hearing panel should be an Independent Co-opted Member.

8. In terms of Appendix 4 the Committee welcomed the streamlined and much improved procedure for hearing complaints, which the Working Group considered in detail.

The Committee noted the need for all complaints to be received in writing and that the form, which would be included on the website for completion, requested information on which part of the Code of Conduct the complainant believed to have been breached.

9. The Committee welcomed the Whistleblowing and Serious Misconduct Policy 2015 which was more transparent and the introduction of a dedicated email address and pro forma for anyone wishing to report an actual or suspected wrongdoing.

10. The Committee welcomed the Annual Report as this would seek to promote and raise the profile of their work.

In conclusion Stuart Fletcher, Deputy Monitoring Officer, made reference to the Member/Officer Protocol that had been developed by the Lead Commissioner which would sit alongside the Member related procedures.

The Chairman wished to thank all involved with the comprehensive review which had been undertaken and this was endorsed by all the Standards Committee Members present.

(1) Resolved:- That the Standards Committee Working Group be thanked for their work and that their recommendations be considered for implementation.

(2) Recommended: That:-

- i. The Terms of Reference for the Standards Committee, attached at Appendix 1, be adopted.
- ii. A work plan be introduced by the Standards Committee.
- iii. The supplement to the Code of Conduct attached at Appendix 3 be adopted by the Council.
- iv. The following mission statement/strapline be adopted by the Standards Committee:

“Responsible for promoting ethical behaviour and building confidence in local democracy.”
- v. The Standards Committee be called the Standards and Ethics Committee.
- vi. The website be refreshed.
- vii. That the membership of the Committee remains as it was currently but that the Hearing Panels established to consider complaints be comprised of:-
 - (a) One Borough Council elected member from the majority party and one from an opposition party; one parish councillor and two independent members
- viii. The revised procedure, at Appendix 4, for dealing with code of conduct complaints be adopted.
- ix. That the revised procedure for the whistleblowing policy, at Appendix 5, be agreed in principle to allow for appropriate consultation to take place.
- x. That an annual report be produced.

28. CODE FOR ROTHERHAM MBC: SENIOR STAFF WORKING TO COUNCILLORS

Consideration was given to a report which set out the details of the Code for Rotherham MBC: Senior Staff Working to Councillors, which had been prepared by Commissioner Sir Derek Myers in liaison with other Commissioners, Leaders of Political Groups, Trade Unions and Senior Officers.

It was essential that the roles and expectations of both Members and Senior Officers working with them were fully understood by both parties. The appendix to the report set out the principles by which these

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relationships would be managed, and provided guidance as to the way in which Members and officers should behave and conduct themselves, when working together.

Although there currently was a Member/Officer Protocol as part of the Constitution, the Code herewith provided more specificity as to the dynamics of the relationship expected between senior officers and Members and would, therefore, form part of the Code of Conduct for Officers.

The Committee sought clarification on a number of points including the holding of senior staff to account, the attendance of officers at scrutiny meetings, avoidance of duplication for challenging policy, the reinforcement of standards expected, good working practices and how this only related to the borough and not parish councils.

Resolved: That the Code for Rotherham MBC: Senior Staff working to Councillors be approved.

29. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the Standards Committee be changed from the Thursday, 10th December, 2015 to now take place on Thursday, 14th January, 2016 at 2.00 p.m.