

STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
Thursday, 1st October, 2015

Present:- Councillor Beck (in the Chair); Mr. P. Beavers, Mr. P. Edler and Mr. D. Rowley.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Finnie and Hughes.

11. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10th September, 2015.

Agreed:- That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

12. SUPPLEMENT TO THE MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

Consideration was given to the proposed supplement to the Council's Code of Code specifically for Rotherham Elected Members suggested by Lead Commissioner Sir Derek Myers.

The suggested supplement provided more transparency for the public to judge the performance of Elected Members with a tangible statement of purpose for all Members.

The Working Group welcomed the inclusion of this supplement, its use of language and how it clearly set out the expectations and standards within the role of a Councillor. It was recommended this be reviewed on an annual basis.

The Working Group were also mindful of the text within the original Code of Conduct and suggested a footnote be included to give the Dictionary definition of bullying.

Agreed:- That the proposed supplement, with the slight revision, be forwarded onto the Standards Committee for consideration and approval.

13. REVISED WHISTLEBLOWING PROCEDURE

Consideration was given to the revised Whistleblowing Policy presented by Stuart Fletcher, Deputy Monitoring Officer, which strengthened the current whistleblowing arrangements in line with the Council's legislative requirements and actively encouraged reporting of information about serious misconduct.

The question as to whether the Council's Whistleblowing Policy should be made available to the public had been referred to the Commissioners for their view. Should it be felt appropriate that the public should be able to access such a Whistleblowing Policy, then a similar, but separate policy

could be prepared for that purpose and made available on the Council's website.

Details of the changes were outlined and the revisions welcomed, especially the dedicated email address and proforma for anyone wishing to report an actual or suspected serious wrongdoing.

The Working Group considered in detail the suggestion of whether or not the Standards Committee had a role in affording an employee more protection from repercussions and reporting lines and challenge as part of the process. This was noted, but believed to be fully enclosed within the whistleblowing and grievance processes within the Council.

However, in order to keep the Standards Committee fully informed of whistleblowing activity it was proposed and agreed that a report be received by the Standards Committee on a quarterly basis.

Agreed:- That the Whistleblowing Procedure be forwarded to the Standards Committee for approval, subject to further information being received on public access to the policy.

14. PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH STANDARDS COMPLAINTS

Consideration was given to the Procedure for Dealing with Standards Complaints presented by Angela Harwood, Legal Adviser, which detailed how the present procedure for dealing with complaints had not been fully updated since the introduction of the Localism Act 2011.

A new procedure for use at any hearings was approved by the Standards Committee on 11th December, 2014, but it was suggested that a new more comprehensive procedure be introduced to ensure the Council fulfils its obligations under the Localism Act 2011.

The introduction of a new procedure would ensure greater transparency to the public about the way the Council dealt with complaints about Member behaviour and a copy of the new procedure was circulated for consideration. The introduction of a bespoke complaint form would also clarify the issues for both the complainant and the officers dealing with the complaint.

It was noted that the addition of a generic email address specifically for standards complaints would also be beneficial.

The Working Group welcomed the proposed procedures and the approach as outlined and suggested various minor amendments which should be incorporated into the final report submitted to the Standards Committee for approval.

Agreed:- That the proposed procedure be forwarded onto the Standards Committee for approval, subject to a few minor administrative

amendments.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Agreed:- That the next meetings be held on Thursday, 22nd October and Thursday, 19th November, 2015 at 2.00 p.m.