

STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE

9th June, 2016

Present:- Councillor McNeely (in the Chair); Councillors Allcock, Finnie, Ireland, Khan and Yasseen; Ms. A. Dowdall, Mr. P. Edler and Ms. J. Porter.

Also in attendance: Independent Persons Mr. P. Beavers and Mr. D. Roper-Newman.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Allen and Simpson, Ms. C. Saltis and Parish Councillors D. Bates, D. Rowley and J. R. Swann.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this meeting.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 31ST MARCH 2016

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee which had taken place on 31st March, 2016.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 31st March, 2016 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

3. WEBSITE UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 37(2) of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 31st March, 2016, the Committee welcomed Mr. Nicholas Fisher (RMBC Communications and Marketing Team) who presented and demonstrated the revised website for the Standards and Ethics Committee.

Discussion took place on the system and form to be used for submission of complaints about Councillors (of Borough, Town and Parish Councils), as well as the need for required/mandatory fields on the form. It was suggested that the online form should be shortened, or sections amalgamated or simplified and that there should also be a print option available, enabling complaints to be hand-written and submitted to the Borough Council by post.

The Committee also discussed the possible use of a 'mystery shopper' exercise and whether examples of case-studies should be published on the website.

The Committee made favourable comments about the appearance and usefulness of the website and thanked Mr. Fisher for his presentation.

It was agreed that, as soon as the necessary alterations and completion of details have been undertaken, all Members of the Standards and Ethics Committee be informed of the date on which the website will go live.

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The Chair and the Vice-Chair of this Committee would be consulted about the final content and format of the website, prior to publication.

4. STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

Consideration was given to the annual report of the Standards and Ethics Committee for the Municipal Year 2015/16.

The Committee agreed the following courses of action arising from issues within the report:-

(a) a report about the review the operation of the Borough Council's Whistleblowing Policy shall be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee;

(b) that, regularly on an annual basis, appropriate and comprehensive training should be provided for Elected Members in respect of the "Standards and Ethical" regime.

Resolved:- That annual report of the Standards and Ethics Committee for the Municipal Year 2015/16, as now submitted, be received and its contents noted.

5. REVIEW OF PROCEDURES RELATING TO MEMBERS

The Assistant Director, Legal Services (and Monitoring Officer) submitted a report about the review undertaken of the relevant procedures in relation to Elected Members, including the Officer-Member Protocol, Allowances and Expenses, Declarations of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality. It was noted that the review had included a comparison with the similar procedures of other local authorities.

During discussion, Committee members made various comments about the contents of the report and it was agreed that a revised report, including the Committee's comments and responses, shall be submitted to the next meeting.

Resolved: (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That, at the next meeting, the Register of Borough Council Members' Interests be made available for inspection by this Committee.

6. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED - UPDATE

The Assistant Director, Legal Services (and Monitoring Officer) submitted a report detailing the progress with the handling of complaints relating to breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct for Members and Co-opted Members. The report listed four current cases of complaint and the action being taken in respect of each one.

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The Committee discussed the cases highlighted within the submitted report.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That the progress in respect of each case be noted.

(3) That, as a general rule, cases shall remain included within the progress reports submitted to meetings of the Standards and Ethics Committee until completion; and after their completion has been formally reported to the Committee, individual cases shall be removed from the progress reports.

7. STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE - FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Assistant Director, Legal Services (and Monitoring Officer) submitted a report detailing the future work programme of the Standards and Ethics Committee for the period until 31st December, 2016. The Committee suggested the following actions:-

(a) a report about the review the operation of the Borough Council's Whistleblowing Policy shall be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee, after adoption of the Governance Review Working Group recommendations;

(b) the Chair and the Monitoring Officer shall consider the need for training for Elected Members in respect of the use of social media by Elected Members and any possible impact upon the reputation of the Local Authority.

Resolved:- That the report be received and its contents noted.

8. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- (1) That the next meeting of the Standards and Ethics Committee take place at the Town Hall, Rotherham on Thursday, 15th September, 2016, commencing at 2.00 p.m.

(2) That future meetings of the Standards and Ethics Committee take place as follows:-

Thursday, 12th January, 2017 (instead of 8th December, 2016)

Thursday, 9th March, 2017