

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12 JUNE 2013 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.35 PM**

Present:-

Wokingham Borough Members:- *Rob Stanton (chairman), Ken Miall, Malcolm Richards and Beth Rowland*

Parish/Town Council representative:- *Roy Mantel*

Also present:- Susanne Nelson-Wehrmeyer, Director of Legal and Electoral Services and Monitoring Officer. Kevin Jacob, Principal Democratic Services Officer

PART I

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4 December 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Chris Bowring, Pauline Helliard-Symons, and Roger Loader, (Parish/Town Council) representative.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

5. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

6. PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL QUESTION TIME

There were no Parish/Town Councillor questions.

7. UPDATE ON COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK

The Committee considered a report set out on Agenda pages 9 to 10 which set out a summary of the Code of Conduct complaints received against Councillors from within the Wokingham Borough in the period December 2012 to May 2013.

In presenting the report, Susanne Nelson-Wehrmeyer commented that all three of the complaints received since December related to Town/Parish Councillors. She continued that in accordance with the Borough Council's adopted procedures she had as the Council's Monitoring Officer, consulted with the Chairman of the Standards Committee and one of the two Independent Persons appointed by the Council, to decide what action to take in respect of the complaints. In the case of two complaints, a decision not to take any further action had been taken, but one complaint had been referred for an investigation. This investigation was still in progress.

The process by which the results of that investigation would be considered again and if it was considered necessary, referred for a hearing, were outlined to the Committee.

It was clarified that two of the complaints had been lodged via email and one complaint had been received via the facility on the Council's website.

It was further clarified that whilst there was provision for the submission of anonymous complaints, these would only be pursued in the most serious of circumstances.

Rob Stanton commented he felt that the current process for considering complaints was working well so and that the speed of the process had improved in comparison to the previous Standards regime. Roy Mantel commented that from the information available, it appeared that a similar process would have been followed under the previous Standards regime.

Beth Rowland commented that she had the concern that to an outsider, the process for the receipt and consideration of complaints could appear to be incestuous in that Officers and Members inside the organisation were deciding what action to take in respect of complaints against other Members, albeit with the input of an Independent Person. She would have preferred a system whereby complaints against Members were considered by someone outside of the organisation. Susanne Nelson-Wehrmeyer responded that although she acknowledged that point of view, she could confidently say that to date, the Independent Person had offered a valuable and truly independent voice to the process.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

8. UPDATE ON THE REVIEW OF THE MOST APPROPRIATE DECISION MAKING GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR WOKINGHAM

The Committee considered a report set out on Agenda pages 11 to 15 which set out the background to the creation of the Decision Making Review Working Group and progress to date. The working group had been established to look at the most appropriate decision making governance arrangements for Wokingham Borough Council.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that if the Council wished to change its current arrangements for decision making, it could not decide to do so until the Annual Council meeting in 2014.

Susanne Nelson-Wehrmeyer commented that the report had been brought to the Committee's attention so that Members were aware that the review was in progress and to highlight that as part of the working group deliberations, the possibility of merging the present Audit Committee and Standards Committee within the broader heading of a Governance Committee had been proposed and discussed although no formal recommendations had been made.

Rob Stanton commented that he was a Member of the Decision Making Review Working Group and commented that the Group was taking its remit very seriously and carefully.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

These are the Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee

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