

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY 25 MARCH 2014 FROM 7.00PM TO 7.45PM**

Present:-

Wokingham Borough Members:- *Rob Stanton (Chairman), Chris Bowring, Ken Miall and Malcolm Richards*

Parish/Town Council representative:- *Ray Duncan*

Also present:-

Anne Hunter, Democratic Services Manager

Andrew Moulton, Monitoring Officer and Head of Governance and Improvement Services

Mary Severin, Deputy Monitoring Officer and Borough Solicitor

PART I

17. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22 October 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment:

Minute No 16, last paragraph, first sentence to be amended to read: *“Malcolm Richards questioned whether a record of complaints was kept so that it was possible to determine if repeated complaints were being made about the same person.”*

18. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Pauline Helliar-Symons and Beth Rowland and John Bingham, Roger Loader and Roy Mantel.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

20. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions received.

21. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions received.

22. PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL QUESTION TIME

There were no Parish/Town Councillor questions received.

23. UPDATE ON COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK

The Committee considered a report on Agenda pages 5 to 7 which set out details of Code of Conduct complaints received since the last meeting.

Andrew Moulton reported that since October four complaints had been received and highlighted the fact that recently two complaints had been received which related to Members not completing their declaration of interest forms correctly eg not declaring directorships of limited companies. Andrew stated that he had written to all Members reminding them to keep their forms up to date and as a result some Members had returned amended forms. Rob Stanton asked if this could be extended to Town and Parish

Councillors and was informed this was something that was dealt with by the Town and Parish Clerks and not by the Borough Council. It was agreed that when the Standards Committee Annual Report was considered by Council in July this would be an opportunity for the Chairman to emphasise the importance of fully completing the forms and keeping them up to date.

Members asked Andrew to ensure that when newly elected Members completed their declaration of interests form that they were checked very carefully. Members felt that the declaration of interests form was often difficult to complete as it was not always clear what interests should be included. It was agreed that it would be helpful if examples of which interests should be included was incorporated in the guidance notes.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report be noted;
- 2) the importance of including all relevant interests in the declaration of interests form and keeping the forms up to date to be reiterated by the Chairman of the Committee at the July Council Meeting;
- 3) Officers to incorporate examples of possible interests in the declaration of the interests guidance notes.

24. STANDARDS COMMITTEE DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2014/2015

The Committee considered a report setting out a draft work programme for the 2014/15 municipal year together with clarification of the role and remit of the Committee.

Andrew Moulton went through the remit of the Committee and highlighted the possible items for consideration over the next two meetings which included the annual report and an update on the training programme on Member Code of Conduct matters. Andrew also put forward that Members may wish to review the Member/Officer Protocol and thought the Committee might find it valuable to hold structured interviews with both Members and Officers to find out if they felt that the Member/Officer Protocol worked and any ways it could be improved. It was also put forward that the Committee could consider reviewing the Whistleblowing Policy.

Members were supportive of reviewing the Member/Officer Protocol as it would be an opportunity to remind Members and Officers of their respective roles. It was therefore agreed that Officers would circulate the Member/Officer Protocol to members of the Committee and Andrew would bring back proposals to the next meeting with the results of the review being considered at the September meeting. Members felt it would be helpful to have, in video format if possible, relevant scenarios and how to deal with them.

The Chairman felt that more junior Officers didn't always understand the role of a Member and thought that some appropriate training was required.

With regard to Member training on the Code of Conduct the Committee asked if this could be extended to towns and parishes. Mary Severin confirmed that training was provided to town and parish councillors and she was happy to include information on declaring interests. Andrew Moulton stated that he would look at the training programme and how town and parish councillors could be included. Members agreed with this proposal but thought that Borough Councillor training should be organised first and then it be decided which parts were appropriate for town and parish councillors.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the report be noted;
- 2) the draft Standards Committee Work Programme 2014/15, as set out in Appendix A, be agreed;
- 3) Andrew Moulton provide proposals for reviewing the Member/Officer Protocol at the next meeting.

25. COMMITTEE MEETING DATES 2014/2015

The Committee noted the Standards Committee meeting dates for the forthcoming municipal year as agreed at the February Council meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Standards Committee meeting dates as set out in the agenda be noted.

These are the Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee

If you need help in understanding this document or if you would like a copy of it in large print please contact one of our Team Support Officers.