



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2013 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Waddington (Chair)

Councillor Senior Councillor Shelton
Councillor Sood

Also present:

Ms Fiona Barber	Independent Member
Ms Amanda Fitchett	Independent Member
Mr Desmond Henderson	Independent Member
Ms Joanne Holland	Independent Member
Mr Stephen Purser	Independent Member
Mr David Lindley	Independent Person
Ms Caroline Roberts	Independent Person

* * * * *

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members are asked to declare any interests they may have in the business on the agenda. No such declarations were made.

11. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.

12. ANNUAL REPORT OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE 2012/13

The Monitoring Officer submitted the first Annual Report of the Standards Committee 2012/13, following the change of legislation which took effect on 1 July 2012. The Committee were asked to note the report and make any recommendations to the Council regarding the Standards regime.

Members felt that the following suggestions should be added to the analysis to provide a better interpretation of the information:-

- a) An analysis of the number of councillors who were the subject of the total number of complaints.
- b) An analysis of the profiles of those making complaints could be obtained by asking for additional information gender, age, ethnicity etc.
- c) The inclusion of the number of councillors who had not received any complaints against them.
- d) Delete - from 'and on some occasion' to 'Board meeting.' In paragraph 3.13.

The Monitoring Officer commented that whilst the monitoring additional information suggested in b) above could be useful it could only be collected on a voluntary basis and therefore some inconsistencies could result.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted, subject to the suggestions made in paragraphs a) to d) above.
- 2) That the additional monitoring information be collected on a voluntary basis initially for a year to assess whether it adds value to the analysis of complaints received.

13. A COUNCILLOR'S GUIDE TO USING SOCIAL MEDIA

The Monitoring Officer submitted a draft of Councillor's guide to using Social Media and asked for the Committee's comments. Advice had been sought from the Council's IT Technical staff who had suggested some changes to make it easier to read.

Following questions from Members', the Monitoring Officer stated that:-

- a) The suggested Code would be issued as good practice guidance;
- b) The Code could be cited as a basis for standards of behaviour in future considerations of complaints;

Member's then made the following comments and suggestions:-

- a) As it was usual for some councillors to blog with a broad mixture of personal and political comments, the Code should present a clear

message that it applied to the political element of a councillor's blog.

- b) The Code should include a contact number to obtain further advice;
- c) The Code should include advice on what a councillor should do in the event of a security attack on their account and give contact details to report this and receive further advice;
- d) Page 2 of the Code should include advice on responsibilities for Safeguarding vulnerable people and children and not identifying them in person;
- e) Delete '(and if it doesn't it should)' at the end of the first sentence on page 3 of Appendix 1;
- f) Change 'avoid publishing' to 'do not publish' under the heading of data protection on page 2 and also include examples of fines etc that have been imposed by Information Commissioners for breaches of data protection legislation;
- g) The Code should give succinct advice on what is reasonable for a councillor to communicate in their official capacity, including re-tweeting information from other councillor to the public; and
- h) Training/refresher training should be provided for new and existing councillors on the use of social media.

RESOLVED:

- 1) that the draft code be received and the amendments suggested above be incorporated into the Code;
- 2) that when the Code has been revised it be sent to councillors who regularly use social media to be 'road-tested'.

14. REGISTER OF INTERESTS

The Monitoring Officer led a discussion in relation to the requirement for an annual updating of the Register of Interests by Elected Members and Co-opted Members.

Whilst the law did not require an annual update, the Monitoring Officer felt that there were merits in Members and Co-opted Members being invited to update their Register on an annual basis including sending a 'nil return' where appropriate. The Council's auditors had noted in the last audit of accounts that there was no annual return of interests and asking for an annual update would address this comment.

A Member commented that the Register of Member's Interests published on the Council's website were not signed or dated. In response, the Monitoring

Officer stated that he had advised Members that their signatures need not be published on the website but he saw the benefit of a date being included to indicate when the Register had been last updated.

RESOLVED:

- 1) that the Monitoring Officer invite Members and Co-opted Members to update their Register of Interests annually and that the date the Register is updated be published on the website.

15. WORK PROGRAMME

The Monitoring Officer requested Members to discuss a work programme for the future.

Members engaged in a general discussion of topics and suggested the following as possible items for a work programme:-

- a) Clear guidance on how Councillors can make complaints against officers – currently issues can be raised with Heads of Service but if they decided not to pursue the complaint there is no other process to go through other than the corporate complaint procedure used by the public.
- b) Protocols for ward members to deal with enquiries from constituents when the member may have a Declarable Pecuniary Interest or a prejudicial Other Disclosable Interest, so that the constituent's issue can be seen to be dealt with and the Member does not risk being subjected to a complaint for not dealing with the issue.
- c) A protocol/guidance on the circumstances in which a councillor can discuss a complaint/issue with the Independent Person and how the Independent Person should conduct that process.
- d) An analysis of how effective the complaints system is working, including timescales for responses and performance against those timescales.

Councillor Senior declared an Other Disclosable Interest when the issue in a) above was raised as her partner was an officer. Although she did not consider the interest to be prejudicial, Councillor Senior indicated that she would not take part in the discussion.

RESOLVED:-

That the Monitoring Officer incorporate the suggestions above into a work programme.

16. COMPLAINT AGAINST COUNCILLORS - UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report giving feedback on complaints against Councillors which had been reviewed and/or determined since the last meeting and updating the Committee on progress with outstanding complaints against Councillors.

Members suggested that it would be helpful to provide a definition of 'vexatious' and 'repetitious' complaints in the procedure and how these would be dealt with.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted.

17. CLOSE OF MEETING

The Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.00pm.