



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Held: WEDNESDAY, 21 JANUARY 2015 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Waddington (Chair)  
Councillor Senior (Vice Chair)

Councillor Sood

Also present:

Ms Fiona Barber	Independent Member
Mr Desmond Henderson	Independent Member
Mr Stephen Purser	Independent Member
Mr David Lindley	Independent Person
Ms Caroline Roberts	Independent Person

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**16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Shelton and Ms Amanda Fitchett.

**17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were asked to declare any interests they might have in the business to be discussed. No such declarations were made.

**18. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 8 October 2014 were confirmed as a correct record.

**19. CORPORATE COMPLAINTS SYSTEM/MONITORING**

The Committee had received a report and a briefing at its meeting on 9 July 2014 and had asked for quarterly monitoring reports and an analysis of

whether complaints were dealt with within the prescribed timescales. A review of the complaints system and monitoring arrangements had since taken place and Alison Greenhill, Director of Finance and Caroline Deane, Vacancy Management Service Manager gave a presentation on the outcomes of the review. A copy of the presentation is attached.

In addition to the comments in the presentation, the following points were noted, some in response to Members' questions:-

- a) The review was looking at all systems that dealt with complaints.
- b) Different complaint systems had different response times and some of the statutory procedures for Children's Services were more focused on delivering a customer oriented outcome than complying with a response within a strict timeframe.
- c) Not all complaints were captured within the CRM system which was considered to be outdated. A more simplified system was required which allowed customer services officers to have one portal logon rather than have to log into 26 individual systems.
- d) To be effective the complaints monitoring needed a system that captured postcodes and ward references in relation to complaints.
- e) More work needed to be done to train staff to differentiate between a service request and a complaint; there were numerous instances where service requests were treated as a complaint through an over cautious approach by staff.
- f) The Council was not responsible for dealing with complaints where services were provided by external service suppliers. E.g housing associations should have their own complaints processes, but further work could be undertaken to see if staff could provide more help, advice and contact details for Members dealing with constituent's complaints in these areas.
- g) The recommendations in the presentation had been supported by the Senior Management Board. As a consequence work was progressing to evaluating a business case for a dedicated complaints team rather than staff undertaking complaints responsibilities as an 'add on; to their main duties.
- h) It was hoped to have the new system in place ready for the induction sessions for new Members after the May elections.
- i) Positive comments received from the public were relayed to staff.

Following the presentation and questions Members made the following observations and comments:-

- a) The experience of members of the outcomes of some complaints systems did not demonstrate confidence in the actual process of how individuals or members were dealt with during the process, contrary to good performance statistics.
- b) The offer of a workshop for Members before any new system was introduced was welcomed.
- c) The use of corporate e-mail addresses by Councillors to report issues had mixed outcomes. They were more effective for dealing with the issues such as the removal of fly-tips etc than trying to deal with constituent's circumstances where eviction and homelessness was concerned.
- d) Councillors needed to have confidence in the system dealing with all complaints.
- e) A revision of the process should aim to be cost effective and deliver benefits to all concerned, using staff time more efficiently and delivering service improvements and benefits as well as proving complainants with a satisfactory outcome wherever possible.
- f) Having fixed timescales is important but it was recognised that it is not always possible to deliver outcomes within them to the satisfaction of the complainant. It is equally important to maintain contact with the complainant and to manage expectations: complainants will often understand it may take longer to resolve an issue if they are fully aware of what is being done and why.
- g) Officers should only respond to complaints if they are competent and skilled in doing so.
- h) Some complaints about Councillors under the Code of Conduct had arisen from a complainant's perception that the councillor was not responding to a complaint, when it was the complaints system that had slowed down the response to the Councillor. It would be helpful if this could be avoided in future.
- i) Some members of the community were unable to make complaints themselves and the system should provide support to vulnerable people to enable them, or their advocate to make a complaint. There are a number of groups in the community who support vulnerable people and they should be engaged in the process.
- j) Some complaints from constituents could involve other agencies such as the Police, NHS etc and the system should encompass a process for Councillors to deal with these as well.
- k) The proposal to abolish four separate lead officers reviewing complaints to have a consolidated corporate approach was welcomed and

supported.

- I) Stephen Purser, Independent Member, offered to assist in providing an independent observation in reviewing the new proposed system.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That officers be thanked for their presentation and contribution to the meeting.
- 2) That the proposals for revising the complaints procedures be welcomed and that officers take Members comments into account when devising the new system.
- 3) That Mr Purser's offer to act as an independent observer on the new complaints system be taken up by officers.

## **20. ANNUAL REPORT OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED**

The Monitoring Officer submitted a draft Annual Report on the complaints received for the period July 2013 to June 2014. Members of the Committee were requested to make comments prior to it being submitted in its final form to a future Council meeting.

In accordance with Rule 1 of Part 4B of the Constitution (Access to Information – Procedure Rules) the report was not available in the public domain as it was in 'draft' form and was only circulated to Members of the Committee. Members were advised that if they wished to discuss specific individuals or circumstances, the Monitoring Officer may need to advise them to exclude the public and press, in accordance with item 7 on the agenda to enable the meeting to continue in private session.

The Monitoring Officer stated that two minor changes were required to the report as follows:-

- a) The first sentence of paragraph 3.2 of the report should be amended to read ' The seven cases to June 2014 involved 8 allegations etc etc '
- b) The heading on the appendix to the report should read 'Complaints 01/07/13 – 30/06/14'

The Monitoring Officer reported that the monitoring form to capture information previously requested by the Committee had been prepared and would be used in future complaints.

Members suggested that the report could include details of:

- a) A comparison with, or statement on, the costs of dealing with complaints under the new arrangement compared to the cost of the previous

system would be helpful. It was recognised that it may not be possible to quantify this in monetary values but recognition of 80% of complaints being dealt with by two people rather than being processed through the old committee system was still worthwhile.

- b) A statement indicating that the time taken to reach a conclusion in a complaint is now quicker than the previous system.
- c) A rewording of paragraph 3.18 to make it easier to read.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the draft report be received and that the report be amended to take account of comments made above.
- 2) That a revised draft be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

## **21. COMPLAINTS AGAINST COUNCILLORS - UPDATE**

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

Councillor Senior referred to a recent article in the Leicester Mercury concerning a complaint against a Councillor and the Monitoring Officer advised that he would be prepared to provide more detailed information should the Committee exclude the public and press from the meeting.

RESOLVED:-

That further discussion on the item be deferred until the public and press had been excluded from the meeting.

## **22. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

The Chair reported that a Special Meeting of the Committee had been arranged for 4 February 2015 to discuss Councillors involvement in the Procurement Process.

## **23. PRIVATE SESSION**

RESOLVED:-

“that the press and public be excluded during consideration of the following reports in accordance with the provisions of Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, because they involve the likely disclosure of 'exempt' information, as defined in the Paragraphs detailed below of Part 1 of Schedule

12A of the Act and taking all the circumstances into account, it is considered that the public interest in maintaining the information as exempt outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Paragraph 1

Information relating to any individual.

Paragraph 2

Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

Paragraph 7c

The deliberations of a standards committee or of a sub-committee of a standards committee established under the provisions of Part 3 of the Local Government Act 2000 in reaching any finding on a matter referred under the provisions of section 60(2) or (3), 64(2), 70(4) or (5) or 71(2) of that Act.

**24. COMPLAINTS AGAINST COUNCILLORS - UPDATE CONTINUED**

The Monitoring Officer provided an update on the complaint and its outcome.

RESOLVED:

That the Monitoring Officer's report be noted and the outcome of the complaint by informal resolution of mediation between the two parties concerned be welcomed.

**25. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.10 pm.