

Standards Committee Minutes

The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting of Wyre Borough Council held on Thursday, 22 June 2017 at the Committee Room 2, Civic Centre, Poulton-le-Fylde.

Standards Committee members present:

Councillors Ian Amos, Marge Anderton, Barry Birch, Terry Lees, Paul Moon and Matthew Vincent

Apologies: None

Officers present:

Liesl Hadgraft, Head of Business Support and Monitoring Officer
Mary Grimshaw, Senior Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Peter Foulsham, Scrutiny Officer

Also present: Barry Parsonage (Independent Person)

1 Election of Chairman for 2017/18

Councillor Barry Birch was elected as Chairman of the Committee for the 2017/18 municipal year.

2 Election of Vice-Chairman for 2017/18

Councillor Moon was elected as Vice Chairman of the Committee for the 2017/18 municipal year.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Michael Vincent declared an Other Significant Interest in item 6 on the agenda, as he knew the identity of the subject member in complaint 2017/01. However, Councillor Michael Vincent took the view that this would not prejudice his judgement and he continued to play a full part in the meeting. He was reminded by the Senior Solicitor that that was a matter for him to decide.

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RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 March 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

Current Complaints: Summary

The Monitoring Officer submitted a schedule summarising complaints of alleged breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct which were currently being processed or had been completed since the last report to the Standards Committee. Ms Hadgraft said that brief details of each of the complaints were included in the schedule. She provided further information to the Committee at the meeting, as follows:

Ref: 2016/04

The Monitoring Officer advised that since the last meeting of the Standards Committee the circumstances surrounding this complaint had changed and as such it was not a matter for the Council. Consequently, no further action was to be taken.

Ref: 2016/18

This complaint has moved forward, the Monitoring Officer and the complainant having met with the subject member March. In addition, further information from both the complainant and subject member had been provided and this had been taken into consideration. Following discussions, the subject member agreed to apologise to the complainant. A letter was due to be sent to the complainant advising them of this. The matter would be concluded once the apology had been made.

Ref: 2017/01

This situation regarding this complaint had moved forward since the agenda and supporting papers for the current meeting had been published. The complaint related to the Cabinet minutes of the meeting of 7 September 2016, with particular reference to a comment that had been made at the meeting.

A meeting with the subject member confirmed that the minutes were, in fact, a true record of what had taken place at the Cabinet meeting. However it was agreed that the content could have been misleading and therefore some clarification to the wording of the Cabinet minutes was required. A report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Cabinet, for their information only, advising them that a footnote providing clarification would be added to the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2016. The Monitoring Officer anticipated that the complaint would be able to be closed at the next meeting of the Standards Committee.

Comment was made that in this case the action being taken could be viewed as unconstitutional. It also appeared that the committee was being used to deal with a matter that was not necessarily a breach of the Code of Conduct. Concern was expressed that the minutes of a meeting could be changed by this process and that might set a precedent, which was not desirable.

The Senior Solicitor confirmed that the proposed course of action was consistent with the council's Constitution. The Monitoring Officer added that there appeared not to have been an intentional breach of the Code so the matter would best be resolved by following the proposed course of action through to its conclusion. The Independent Person, Barry Parsonage, advised the committee that the subject member had offered a change in the wording which would be included in the report to the next Cabinet meeting.

A question was posed as to whether this was a matter in which the Chief Executive should be involved. Liesl Hadgraft confirmed that the Chief Executive would be taking the report to the Cabinet.

Another view was put forward that if the subject member and the complainants were supportive of the proposed course of action, which would correct the impression that was originally inadvertently given by the subject member, such an outcome would be in everyone's interests.

Following further discussion the committee noted the proposed process, with the Monitoring Officer to report the outcome to the next meeting of the Standards Committee.

Ref: 2017/02

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the subject member had attended the required training as set out in the schedule, and this complaint was now concluded.

Ref: 2017/03

The Monitoring Officer had held an initial meeting with Barry Parsonage, an Independent Person. Following the application of a preliminary test, and taking into account other relevant information surrounding the circumstances, it was agreed that the subject member was not acting as a councillor at the time of the complaint.

RESOLVED:

That the summary of current complaints submitted by the Monitoring Officer and her verbal report on each of the complaints referred to in the meeting, be noted.

6 Training for Councillors

The committee discussed members' training and development needs and requested that the following actions be taken:

- (i) All councillors be reminded about the possible implications of using council systems in situations when they might not be seen to be acting in their role as a councillor, and

- (ii) The introduction of a protocol on the use of social media be explored and appropriate training arranged if necessary

7 Date of next meeting

The Committee noted that its next scheduled meeting was currently due to be held at 6pm on Thursday 16 November 2017.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and finished at 6.52 pm.