



Standards Committee

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee of Wyre Borough Council held on 6 November 2014 at the Civic Centre, Poulton-le-Fylde.

Councillors present: Councillors M Anderton, B Birch (Chairman), M Gandhi, Lees (Vice-Chairman) and M Vincent.

Officers present:

Michael Ryan (Corporate Director, People and Places & Monitoring Officer), Mary Grimshaw (Senior Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer) and Roy Saunders (Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager).

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Collinson and Tony Mozley (Interim Independent Person).

STA.12 Declarations of Interest

None.

STA.13 Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9 July 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

STA.14 Independent Person

The Monitoring Officer reminded Members that Mr Tony Mozley had been appointed at the Council meeting on 16 October 2014 as the Independent Person for Ethical Standards Issues on an interim basis until a more permanent appointment could be made.

He said that Mr Mozley was one of three independent persons appointed jointly by Blackpool Council and Fylde Council. That arrangement seemed to be working well and there appeared to be potential benefits in Wyre also sharing Independent Persons with those authorities.

RESOLVED that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to discuss with the Monitoring Officers of Blackpool and Fylde Councils the possibility of Wyre also participating in the shared arrangements for appointing Independent Persons for Ethical Standards Issues.

STA.15 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 Committees.

RESOLVED that the position on the complaints summarised in the schedule be noted.

STA.16 Code of Conduct Complaint: Reference 2014/07

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report summarising a complaint made by Councillor Brooks concerning a possible breach of the Council's Code of Conduct by Councillor Murphy. His finding, following consultation with the interim Independent Person and meetings with the complainant and the subject Member, was that there was insufficient evidence that Councillor Murphy had breached the Code of Conduct

Mr Ryan said, in response to questions, that he and Mr Mozley had taken at face value the information provided by the two Councillors concerned and, given the circumstances of the complaint, they had not felt it necessary to interview any other Councillors or officers.

Councillor M Anderton said that, in her view, checks had been made to establish which Labour Members Councillor Murphy had apologised to.

Councillor B Birch said that he had been concerned that he had not been aware of this complaint until he had seen an article published in the Blackpool Gazette based on the summary report submitted to this meeting. He suggested that, in future, the Chairman of the Standards Committee should be informed when a Code of Conduct complaint was received. He acknowledged, however, that it was not necessary for full details to be provided to him at that stage, because it was important to avoid any possible perception that he might have predetermined the issue prior to a report being submitted to the Committee or hearing being convened.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the findings of the Monitoring Officer and his reasons for reaching them be accepted and that no further action be taken in connection with the complaint.
- (2) That the Council's complaints procedure flowchart be amended to indicate that the Chairman of the Standards Committee would be informed of the receipt of a code of conduct complaint prior to any information about it being put into the public domain.

STA.17 Committee on Standards in Public Life: Annual Report 2013/14

The Monitoring Officer submitted extracts from the latest Annual Report of the Committee for Standards in Public Life, which referred to ethical standards in local government. There was clearly some concern that, whilst the previous standards regime had been considered to be too prescriptive and bureaucratic, the very limited sanctions available under the current local arrangements were not effective. The report also stressed the importance of explaining the Code of Conduct and ethical standards arrangements as part of the induction process for new Councillors. He said that arrangements were already being made to include such information in the induction programme for new Wyre Councillors immediately following the local elections to be held in May 2015. He also planned to provide a briefing for all Councillors prior to the Council meeting in June 2015.

RESOLVED that the comments of the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the arrangements being made by the Monitoring Officer to brief Councillors be noted.

STA.18 Next Meeting

RESOLVED that the next meeting of the Committee be held at 6.00pm on Thursday 19 March 2015.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and finished at 6.25 pm.

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