

Minutes



Standards Committee

Date: 24 March 2015

Time: 5.30pm

Present: Mrs H Taylor OBE (Chair), Councillors Fouweather and Guy, Mr G Hancock, Mr B John and Ms T Britton

Mr G Price (Monitoring Officer), Mrs J Owen (Chief Legal Officer) and Mrs M Durkin (Democratic Administrator)

Apologies: Mr J Pickering and Mr P Westwood

1 Apologies for Absence

Noted above.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Chairs Announcements

There were no formal announcements for this meeting.

4 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 January, 2015 were submitted.

Re Minute 4, Request for Dispensation, the Monitoring Officer reported that the Council had not removed Member Neighbourhood Allowances as a potential budget saving for the forthcoming year, the amount remained the same but the criteria had been tightened.

Agreed

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 January, 2015 be taken as read and confirmed.

5 Complaints

The Monitoring Officer reported that there had been no further complaints received since the last meeting.

Agreed

That the report be noted.

6 Response to Wales Audit Office Review of Whistleblowing

Consideration was given to a report detailing an action plan responding to the six recommendations made by the Welsh Audit Office (WAO) as part of their analysis of Newport City Council's Whistleblowing Policy. Whilst strengths were noted and acknowledged by WAO, there were a number of recommendations made to strengthen the current policy. This action plan outlined the recommendations, detailed the action it was planned to take, appropriate timescales by which each action would be completed, and the responsible Officer for ensuring that these actions were taken.

The Monitoring Officer reported that progress had been made against the agreed action plan for the WAO recommendations on strengthening the Authority's whistleblowing procedures. The primary change had been an amendment to the policy and guidance for managers. The Senior HR Business Partner had revised the policy and ensured compliance not only with the recommendations listed by WAO, but had also aligned it with the Public Concern At Work (PCAW) Code of Practice. PCAW were the leading authority in the field of whistleblowing and campaign for the Government to adopt their drafted Code of Practice. Their campaign 'The First 100' encouraged public sector employers such as local authorities and health boards, private sector employers from a wide variety of industries, and regulators to adopt their Code of Practice; this might be an action that the Council wished to consider for the future and further information could be provided by Human Resources on the benefits and implications.

The proposed changes to the whistleblowing policy would need to be considered by the trade unions through engagement at the Employee Partnership Forum (EPF) and the Monitoring Officer would report back to the next meeting on any feedback from their meeting held on 19 March, 2015.

Agreed

To note the update

7 Procedure for Dealing with Complaints of Breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct

Consideration was given to a report detailing the procedure when Standards Committee were required to reach a decision following an investigation by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales ("the Ombudsman") or the Council's Monitoring Officer under Part III of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Government Investigations (Functions of Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees) (Wales) Regulations 2001 ("the Regulations").

The Monitoring Officer reported on specific points detailed in the Report including potential conflicts of interest i.e. where the Monitoring Officer had already acted as Legal Advisor to the Standards Committee where the Ombudsman had investigated, the Council's Deputy Monitoring Officer would then be involved in the meeting dealing with the breach of the Members' code of conduct, the treatment of documents insofar as being confidential solely for Standards Committee members, the composition of the proposed Committee (whether it should be a lesser number as recommended by the Monitoring Officer – 3 to 5 members with at least one Council Member).

Reference was also made to the conduct and the actual procedure at a meeting. The Monitoring Officer indicated that it might be useful for the Committee for a "mock hearing" to be undertaken at a future date. He also reported that a short summary/flow chart on the procedure would be added to this current document for members' ease of reference.

The Monitoring Officer responded to members' questions including the points made by Mr Pickering who was not in attendance.

The Monitoring Officer asked members to further examine the procedure and let him have any comments.

Agreed

That the report be noted and that further consideration be given to the Procedure (with a summary/flow chart added) with a “mock hearing” being undertaken at the next meeting.

8 Future Work Programme

Members considered matters in the future Work Programme. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the next item on the Committee’s list of priorities was Gifts and Hospitality.

Agreed

That the Monitoring Officer submit a report on Gifts and Hospitality.

9 Date of Next Meeting

The next meetings to be held on Thursdays, 16 July and 22 October, 2015 at 5.30 p.m. in Room 4, Civic Centre.