



Standards Committee

11:00 to 11:25

4 July 2023

Present: Councillors Driver (chair following appointment), Sands (M) (vice chair following appointment), Huntley, Lubbock, Sands (S) and Worley, Mr P Franzen (co-opted member) and Linda Barber (Independent Person)

Apologies: Councillor Schmierer

1. Appointment of chair

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Driver as chair for the ensuing civic year.

2. Appointment of vice-chair

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Sands (M) as vice-chair for the ensuing civic year.

3. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meetings held on 5 July 2022.

5. Annual Report on Standards Activity

The Head of Legal and Procurement (Monitoring Officer) presented the report. Members were advised that the committee could go into a private session if they required further details on the individual councillors who had received complaints.

During discussion, a member welcomed this useful report, which reflected the good relationship between councillors, and councillors and officers. The Peer Review had been a valuable for officers and members across the council to “point the finger” at issues within the organisation.

Mr Franzen referred to the informal training session facilitated by the Head of Legal and Procurement and expressed his disappointment that so few members attended. He considered that despite being experienced in local government standards, he now had a better understanding of how the Code of Conduct worked. Other members concurred that this training was valuable and important, and the slides should be available online for other members to access.

The Head of Legal and Procurement confirmed that all new councillors received training on the Code of Conduct as part of their new member induction. She was in the process of preparing a session for members on the roles and functions of the Scrutiny and Audit Committees to be held in September, and it would be a good opportunity to add the Standards Committee to that session. The session could be recorded and available for members to view on the e-Councillor share point.

In reply to a question, the Head of Legal and Procurement explained that where occasionally councillors disagreed with each other, for example during debate at a meeting, she would usually speak to the group leaders so that they could work together to resolve the issue. She said that she would appreciate members sending her a note before a meeting if a member reading the agenda papers has a query regarding declarations of interest.

During discussion the Head of Legal and Procurement referred the governance issues of councils such as Thurrock Council, Woking Borough Council and Liverpool City Council, and that there was now greater priority being made on the role of the monitoring officer in local government. The inspection report on the former Northumberland County Council identified issues with councillors' relationships with each other, councillors' relationship with officers, and councillors' ability to challenge, that had contributed to its failure. The council's Peer Review had looked at the effectiveness of the council's scrutiny and audit functions and there were some cross overs with the Standards Committee.

The chair asked whether the council needed the Standards Committee as it had only met once in the last year and whether the resources in terms of officer time were justified. The Head of Legal and Procurement said that meeting just once a year demonstrated that the governance system was going well but it was good to have arrangements in place in case further meetings were required.

In reply to a question, the Head of Legal and Procurement said that complainants could appeal to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman if they were not satisfied with the way their complaint had been handled. Councillors who were dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint against them could apply for a judicial review in the high courts.

In reply to a member's question about the vacancy for a co-opted independent person, the Head of Legal and Procurement said as the committee did not meet regularly it did not seem appropriate to appoint another person to it.

RESOLVED to adopt the annual report.

CHAIR