



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

10:30 am – 11:45am

1 February 2013

Present: Councillors Grenville, Sands (M), Lubbock and Carlo; Co-opted members Mr P Franzen and Mr C Thrower

In attendance: Mr Alastair Roy (Independent Person)

Apologies: Councillor Gee, Councillor Grahame (Councillor Carlo substituting)

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Sands (M) as Chair.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

RESOLVED to consider the appointment of Vice Chair at the next meeting

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2012

5. ROLE OF THE INDEPENDENT PERSON

The Head of law and governance presented the report and introduced Alastair Roy, the appointed Independent Person, to the committee. The emphasis of the new approach was to move away from the overly prescriptive previous regime in order to deal with matters quickly and in a flexible way.

During discussion, the head of law and governance explained that the process for dealing with complaints was that this should initially be considered by the monitoring officer. He may consult with the Independent Person on the matter if there was a possibility that an investigation could be warranted. The matter may then be passed to the standards committee for further review.

Peter Franzen said that the implementation of the new standards regime would be a chance to train councillors with regards to standards and standards committee should be proactive rather than just having a reactive, quasi-judicial role.

Alastair Roy said that his clear role was to give advice to anyone that needed it and he could be available to both councillors and the public. However, formal complaints should always be addressed to the monitoring officer in the first instance. The standards committee also had an important role as the decision maker in cases, in consultation with the Independent Person.

Members recognised that standards committee had an important role in influencing councillor's behaviour, including through identifying training needs and opportunities. The head of law and governance stated that an updated standards work programme would be drafted in consultation with the independent person, for the next standards committee meeting. He also confirmed that training sessions for members, particularly on planning and declarations of interest, would be key. A member suggested that the use of role plays and case studies was a good way to deliver this training.

A member expressed concern that there would need to be sufficient support for any complainant and also for the person at the focus of the complaint. The head of law and governance said that he would always be mindful of this need when dealing with any situations.

RESOLVED to:-

- 1) agree to the general approach for dealing with complaints in conjunction with the appointed Independent Person; and
- 2) Recommend to Council the appointment of Mrs Fiona Anthony as the reserve Independent Person.

6. MEMBER'S INTERESTS

The head of law and governance introduced the report.

The deputy monitoring officer encouraged members to consult the monitoring officer if they had any concerns about whether an interest should be declared. He emphasised that for the first time, it had become a criminal offence to take part in a discussion, or vote on, an item that you had registered as a "declarable pecuniary interest" (DPI) and the onus was on members to ensure they declare any interests. He said that the fine as a result of conviction would not exceed £5000 as opposed to the £1000 noted in the report. The head of law and governance added that a member is also obliged to declare any DPIs that their partner may have but they do not have to name their partner. If a DPI had been registered, there would be no need to declare it again at a committee meeting. However, members were reminded that the Norwich city council code protocol was to declare the interest again for transparency and openness and to leave the room during the discussion.

The democratic services manager confirmed that reminders about completing declaration of interest forms would be sent out at six monthly intervals. However, it remained the responsibility of members to update their own forms.

RESOLVED to:-

- 1) note the the report,
- 2) ask the Monitoring Officer to:
 - a) prepare a work programme for standards committee
 - b) arrange for appropriate training to be included in the councillor training and development programme
- 3) to recommend Council to confirm the devolution of power to Standards Committee to grant Dispensations to members; and
- 4) in urgent cases, to delegate to the Monitoring Officer the power to grant Dispensations to members with the requirements to report any such urgent grant at the next meeting of the Standards Committee.

8. Schedule of future meetings

RESOLVED ;

To hold quarterly meetings to update the work programme and feedback on training issues, with the next meeting to be held in June 2013.

CHAIR