

Minutes of a meeting of the **STANDARDS PANEL** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Priory Road, on Wednesday, 24 April 2013 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT

G R Aley
M G Chandler

M Howard
A M Newton

R Perkins

Apologies for absence were received from or on behalf of Councillor R J H Creese

In Attendance: Monitoring Officer, Principal Member Services Officer and Member Services Officer (Regulatory)

1) **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

Councillor Aley was appointed Chairman of the Panel.

2) **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

Councillor Newton was appointed Vice-Chairman of the Panel.

3) **STANDARDS ANNUAL REPORT**

The Panel considered a report by the Assistant Director – Democratic Services setting out the Standards Annual Report - 2012/2013.

At the meeting of full Council on 27 June 2012, the arrangements for dealing with complaints against members were adopted in line with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011. The report provided information relating to work undertaken since the implementation of the new standards regime on 1 July 2012 and up to 31st March 2013.

On 1 July 2012, at the time the new standards arrangements were implemented, the Monitoring Officer had 4 complaints in the system. The Regulations allowed for existing complaints to be considered under the new arrangements. Members noted that 1 complaint was still ongoing but that the other 3 had been concluded.

Since the introduction of the new regime on 1 July 2012, 4 complaints had been received. It was noted that 1 complaint did not relate to a breach of the code, 1 had been resolved under informal resolution, 1 complaint was referred to the police and 1 was in the process of initial information being sought.

No conflicts of interest had been raised regarding the Monitoring Officer or Independent Person.

DECISION: That the Standards Annual Report for 1 July 2012 – 31 March 2013 is noted.

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4) STANDARDS ARRANGEMENTS

The Panel considered a report by the Assistant Director – Democratic Services seeking approval to the changes to the Standards arrangements and suggesting extending the appointment of the current Independent Person.

Members noted that following the implementation of the new Standards regime on 1 July 2012, lessons had been learnt and potential refinements to the arrangements had been identified.

The Panel supported the Monitoring Officer seeking authority in the following areas:

- To seek further resolution or other action where appropriate to resolve the complaint without a hearing, when an investigation has been conducted and a breach has been found
- To not pursue a complaint at any stage if it is deemed to no longer merit consideration under the arrangements
- That on receipt of a complaint against all or the majority of members of a parish council, the Monitoring Officer be granted authority to notify the members named within the complaints and seek their comments as per current arrangements, but be authorised to refer the complaints back to the parish council to be dealt with under its own complaints procedure.

However, Members felt that the above should be subject to consultation with the Independent Person.

Members noted that the Localism Act 2011 introduced a new role of Independent Person to provide advice and guidance to the Monitoring Officer and members who were the subject of an allegation. It was agreed at the meeting of full Council on 27 June 2012 that Mr Tony Wicks would be appointed as the Independent Person from 1 July 2012 until the annual meeting in May 2013. The appointment was for an initial term of one year to enable a review of the arrangements for this role to take place.

Members supported the extension of the Independent Person's contract until the Annual meeting of Council in May 2015. Members also suggested that any subsequent appointment should be on a 4 yearly basis to mirror the electoral term.

DECISION: That it be recommended to Council that

- (a) The following alterations be made to the Standards Arrangements as previously approved by Council on 27 June 2012:

i) That the Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the Independent Person) be granted the authority to seek further resolution or other action where appropriate to resolve the complaint without a hearing, when an investigation has been conducted and a breach has been found.

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ii) That the Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the Independent Person) be granted the authority to not pursue a complaint at any stage if it is deemed to no longer merit consideration under the arrangements.

iii) That on receipt of a complaint against all or the majority of the members of a parish council, the Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the Independent Person) be granted authority to notify the members named within the complaints and seek their comments as per current arrangements, but be authorised to refer the complaints back to the town / parish council to be dealt with under its own complaints procedure: and

- b) That Council agree to extend the appointment of the current Independent Person, Mr. Tony Wicks, until the Annual Meeting of Council in May 2015 and that further appointments be on a 4 yearly basis, co-terminus with Councillor membership.

(The meeting ended at 7.30 pm)

(End of minutes)