

Minutes



To: All Members of the Standards Committee, Chief Executive, Chief Officers

From: Legal, Democratic & Statutory Services
Ask for: Elaine Shell
Ext: 25565

STANDARDS COMMITTEE 29 JUNE 2015

ATTENDANCE

MEMBERS OF THE PANEL

R H Beeching (Vice-Chairman), N Bell, D J Hewitt (Chairman), A Plancey, D T F Scudder

Upon consideration of the agenda for the Standards Committee meeting on 29 June 2015 as circulated, copy annexed, conclusions were reached and are recorded below:

Note: No conflicts of interest were declared by any member of the Committee in relation to the matters on which decisions were reached at this meeting.

PART I ('OPEN') BUSINESS

1. MINUTES

- 1.1 The Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 9 February 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2. STANDARDS UPDATE

[Officer Contact: Kathryn Pettitt, Chief Legal Officer Tel: 01992 555527]

- 2.1 The Committee received a report updating them on issues relating to the standards regime, introduced in local government following the Localism Act 2011.
- 2.2 The Chief Legal Officer advised that all Members who had been present the Council meeting in February 2015 had applied for and received a dispensation

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

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to participate in the budget debate.

- 2.3 The Committee was advised that, earlier this year, a Member of Dorset County Council had become the first councillor to be found guilty of an offence under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011; the councillor, being a non-executive director of a housing association, had participated in a vote at a meeting where a core strategy document, with potential impact on that housing association, had been considered. During discussion on this matter, Members also noted an extract from the 'Committee on Standards in Public Life Annual Report 2014' relating to local government, in which the report highlighted the importance of training new councillors on the standards expected of them.

RESOLVED:

- 2.4 The Committee UNANIMOUSLY agreed
1. That the report be noted.
 2. That Group Leaders be requested to remind Members of the importance of attending training modules to be provided on the standards regime as part of the Member Induction Programme following the County Council elections in 2017
 3. That Members be reminded to keep their disclosable pecuniary interest (DPI) forms updated.

3. COMPLAINTS UPDATE

[Officer Contact: Kathryn Pettitt, Chief Legal Officer Tel: 01992 555527)]

- 3.1 Following the Localism Act 2011, a new standards regime was introduced for local authority Members. In July 2012, the County Council adopted a revised Code of Conduct for Members and a procedure for dealing with complaints that Members had breached the Code. The report considered by the Committee at this meeting provided Members with information on the number of complaints received by the Chief Legal Officer and comments from the Council's Independent Person on the nature of the complaints received.
- 3.2 The Committee noted that, since the introduction of the new Code of Conduct for Members, a total of 9 complaints had been received. Of these, 2 had been found not to relate to the Members' capacity as County Councillor and, therefore, had not engaged the Code. In all of the remaining cases, following consultation with the Independent Person, the Chief Legal Officer (as Monitoring Officer), had informed the complainant that their complaint had not amounted to a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct. In one case the complainant appealed the decision of the Monitoring Officer not to investigate the complaint. In accordance with the procedure for dealing with such complaints, the Chief Executive had considered the appeal; the appeal was subsequently dismissed.

3.3 Whilst none of the complaints made were considered to have amounted to a breach of the Code of Conduct, Members noted that the nature of all of the complaints made related to communication issues. Members also heard from the Council's Independent Person and noted his comments in the report (paragraph 5.1). He advised that he considered that, in the majority of cases, Members were carrying out a *"first class service"* and that, whilst the number of complaints was very low and that none had thus far engaged the Council's Code of Conduct, the Committee had an opportunity to remind Members *"to reflect on how they conduct themselves in public and to reinforce the expected professionalism and integrity of their day to day communications with constituents, especially with the advent of modern media communications"* such as twitter and facebook.

RESOLVED:

3.4 The Committee UNANIMOUSLY agreed

1. That the report be noted.

2. That Group Leaders be requested:-

(a) to remind Members of their duty to abide by the Council's Code of Conduct and to be particularly mindful of their communications with constituents, including social media; and

(b) to encourage Members to attend training to be provided on the Council's Code of Conduct and on the use of social media as part of the Member Induction programme following the County Council elections in 2017.

4. OTHER PART I BUSINESS

4.1 There was no other business.

**KATHRYN PETTITT
CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER**

CHAIRMAN _____

**CHAIRMAN'S
INITIALS**

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