

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 26 March 2014 at 6.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Jim Mallory (Chair), Pauline Morrison (Vice-Chair), Obajimi Adefiranye, Julia Fletcher, Alan Hall, Ami Ibitson, Stella Jeffrey and Helen Klier.

Independent members: David Roper-Newman and Cathy Sullivan.

Apologies received from Gill Butler, Leslie Thomas and Hannah Le Vay.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the fact that Leslie Thomas, Independent Member was appointed as Queen's Counsel in the most recent round of appointments by the Lord Chancellor. The Committee wished for its congratulations to Leslie to be formally recorded and for this to be relayed to Leslie Thomas Q.C.

21. Declaration of interests

David Roper-Newman declared a personal interest in Item 5.

22. Minutes

RESOLVED that subject to an amendment to record that Councillor Julia Fletcher submitted her apologies, the minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

23. Annual Review of Complaints Made Under the Council's Whistleblowing Policy

Kath Nicholson, Head of Law and Monitoring Officer introduced the report and explained that there had been six referrals since the last report considered by the Standards Committee. The nature of the complaints were broad ranging and Kath Nicholson explained that on receipt of whistleblowing complaints she seeks to have matters resolved in the most appropriate manner.

In response to an enquiry as to the position where the whistleblower may be maliciously motivated, Kath Nicholson explained that she will always arrange for an investigation to be undertaken where there appears to be a reasonable cause for concern and that the whistleblower's motive in the raising of a complaint is irrelevant.

It was further suggested that in future the review report should include some feedback from complainants on the application of the policy and their satisfaction with the process.

It was noted that the Policy required minor amendments to reflect the Committee is no longer chaired by an independent person and to remove the references to the District Auditor.

RESOLVED to note the referrals under the Councils' Whistleblowing Policy as

set out in the report and reported to the Committee and to agree the proposed amendments to the Whistleblowing Policy.

24. Review of procedure for handling complaints of breach of member code of conduct

Kath Nicholson, Head of Law and Monitoring Officer presented the report and explained that the report provides information about the procedure for handling complaints of a breach of the Member Code of Conduct, its application to date and to consider whether any changes were required to the current procedures.

It was explained that the procedures were to be flexible, fair and as uncomplicated as possible. Kath Nicholson also gave a brief review of the three allegations considered under the procedures.

The Committee's attention was also drawn to the research undertaken into a sample of the procedures used in other local authorities.

Proposed revisions to the procedures were appended to the report at Appendix 2.

RESOLVED to note the report and to agree the changes as set out in Appendix 2.

25. Member Induction 2014 Code of Conduct

Salena Mulhere, Overview and Scrutiny Team Manager, presented the item and provided an overview of the draft member induction programme proposed following the elections in May.

The Chair identified the need for ethical standards to be an integral part of members induction programme and for strategies to be in place to ensure that all members receive appropriate training and support.

There was wide ranging discussions in relation to encouraging member attendance at training sessions and various potential strategies to enhance member development and training; ranging from 1:1 training, mentoring, online training, joint training with other boroughs, and the influence of political groups in such matters.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and that political groups be urged to ensure member attendance at training.

26. Independent Person Appointments

The Committee was requested to note the appointment of Erica Pienaar and Wendy Innes to act as Independent Person to assist the Council in the investigation of complaints under the Member Code of Conduct.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 8:10pm.