

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 20 May 2015 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Obajimi Adefiranye, Brenda Dacres, Colin Elliott, Alan Hall, Simon Hooks, Hilary Moore, Pauline Morrison, Paul Bell, Andre Bourne and Jim Mallory.

Apologies for absence were received from Hannah Le Vay

3. Declaration of interests

None were declared.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Committee meetings held on the 11 December 2014 and 26 March 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. Local Code of Corporate Governance - Review of Compliance 2014-15

Paul Aladenika, Principal Policy Officer, introduced the report and explained that this is a standard report presented to the Committee annually.

A brief discussion followed and it was commented that the implementation of Modern.Gov was a good idea. It was further commented that the use of actual examples throughout the review was to be commended.

An enquiry was raised as to whether any information on the Lewisham Congress which met in October 2014 had been published. Paul Aladenika agreed to make such information available to members of the Committee.

It was also clarified that the outcomes of the Peer Review were reported to Business Panel and Overview & Scrutiny Committees as well as to the Mayor & Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the outcomes of the review be endorsed.

6. Review of Whistle blowing Referrals and Policy

Helen Glass, Deputy Monitoring Officer, introduced the report and explained there had been two referrals since the last report considered by the Standards Committee.

In relation to Case A, the Monitoring Officer had referred the matter to the Executive Director Children and Young People Directorate (CYP) for the matter to be dealt with in accordance with the Directorate's procedures.

Alan Docksey, Head of Resources, CYP, explained to the Committee that on receipt of the complaint, which related to staffing and management issues at a school, it was felt appropriate for the issues to be investigated and responded to by the school and consequently the matter was passed to the Chair of Governors.

It was further explained that there had recently been a significant amount of change at the school. The Governing Body had been dissolved and replaced with an Interim Executive Board (IEB). This matter was being progressed by the IEB although there was an acknowledgement due to the passage of time and staff changes that matters may be more challenging to deal with at this stage. Schools Human Resources Team would assist and offer a view as they are contracted to provide human resources advice to the school and would have knowledge of some of the issues raised.

It was commented that it was for the Council in dealing with complaints brought under the whistleblowing policy to demonstrate independence and that it would be appropriate to seek to obtain some corroboration of the matters complained about before forwarding the matter to the school .

It was suggested that the better course of action would have been for the matter to be investigated by the Council and not simply referred to the school. An effective whistleblowing policy must instil confidence that people can raise issues and that those issues will be properly investigated.

There were some comparable comments in relation to Case B. It was also asked that as that complaint related to safeguarding was there not a different procedure to be adopted. Officers explained that where complaints are made about safeguarding these are always matters of serious concern and CYP Directorate will always look for corroboration. However where the complainant is anonymous and no school identified, in the absence of any further information, it is very difficult to know how to progress.

It was noted that it seemed to be a generic response that enquiries about schools are referred to the school/governing body. A request was made for the Children & Young Person's Directorate procedures to be submitted to the Committee.

In response to an enquiry about timescales in relation to Case A it was confirmed that this had not been agreed with the IEB. It was agreed that information in relation to timescales will be referred back to the Committee.

In relation to Case B members enquired whether the response from the Monitoring Officer had been sufficiently proactive. The Deputy Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that she did not have knowledge of the actual complaint but explained that if the complaint was anonymous and did not identify a particular school, save attempting to obtain further information, it would be virtually impossible to take matters further. The Deputy Monitoring Officer agreed to report to the Committee after making further enquiries into the complaint.

RESOLVED that:

(i) there be a review of the Whistle blowing Policy and Procedures. An update of the review to be brought to the next meeting of the Standards Committee.

(ii) timescales in relation to the investigations into Case A be provided to the committee members.

(iii) the Monitoring Officer review Case B and provide an update as to whether there was sufficient information for a safeguarding investigation.

(iv) the report be otherwise noted

7. Appointments to Sub-Committees

RESOLVED that Councillors Dacres, Adefiranye, Bell, Elliott, Mallory, and Gill Butler and Leslie Thomas be members of Standards Sub Committee A.

Councillors Hooks, Bourne, Hall, Moore, Morrison and Cathy Sullivan and David Roper-Newman be members of Standards Sub Committee B.

The meeting ended at 7:50pm