

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Monday, 20 March 2017

PRESENT: Councillor Suresh Patel (Chair); Councillor Brian Oldham (Deputy Chair);
Councillors Andrew Kilbride and Les Marriott

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cathrine Russell and Michael Hill.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 December 2016 were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

3. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

5. MATTERS OF URGENCY WHICH BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THE CHAIR IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED

There were none.

6. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE STANDARDS WORKING GROUP (WORK PLAN)

The Standards Committee considered the draft Terms of Reference for the Standards Working Group (Work Plan). The Chair advised that the Standards Working Group (Work Plan) had considered the draft Terms of Reference in detail and agreed that it should be presented to the Standards Committee for approval.

Following approval of the Terms of Reference for the Standards Working Group (Work Plan), the Working Group could embark upon the work that it has been commissioned to undertake by the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Terms of Reference for the Standards Working Group (Work Plan) are approved.

7. WORK PLAN FOR THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE 2017/2018

The Standards Committee was asked to approve the draft 2017/2018 Standards Committee Work Plan.

It was noted that the establishment of a Work Plan would ensure that the Committee can meet all of its responsibilities and obligations during the year. It is seen as good practice for the Standards Committee to produce an annual Work Plan. The Chair advised that the Standards Working Group (Work Plan) had considered the draft Work Plan in detail and agreed that it should be presented to the Standards Committee for approval.

In response to a query, the Standards Committee was advised that the approval of a Work

Plan for the Standards Committee would not affect the responsibility or discretion of the Committee during the year, as the Committee could, at subsequent meetings, agree to update the Work Plan, if it is necessary to do so. The Committee suggested that the Work Plan is a standing agenda item at each meeting of the Standards Committee.

In answer to a query regarding the Standards regime, the Committee was advised that arrangements are in place and initial assessments are dealt with by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with one of the Council's statutory Independent Persons. The Scheme is a serious, lengthy, complicated process. It is robust. Plans are in place to look at the process to ascertain whether it could be made less lengthy. Complaints would only come before the Standards Committee if a complaint went to a Hearing following an investigation. Membership of the Hearings Panel would be drawn from the Standards Committee.

In answer to a query regarding the Independent Persons, the Committee heard that the Independent Person is normally "invisible" to the Committee. The Independent Person advise the Standards complaints process. It was suggested that when training is scheduled for the Standards Committee that the Independent Persons are invited to attend.

- AGREED:
- 1) That the Work Plan for the Standards Committee 2017/2018 be agreed.
 - 2) That the Work Plan for the Standards Committee 2017/2018 is a standing agenda item of every meeting of the Standards Committee.
 - 3) That the Working Group (Work Plan) commences on work in accordance with its Terms of Reference as identified on the Work Plan. The Working Group is required to input into these items and bring such items to the Standards Committee for consideration and decision as required.

8. REVIEW - WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

The Standards Committee received the draft Whistleblowing Policy. The Standards Working Group (Work Plan), at its meeting on 2 March 2017, considered the broad principles of the draft Policy and agreed that Officers should further investigate the provision of an external organisation to provide a confidential hotline as part of the Whistleblowing Policy and that the draft Policy is presented to this Committee.

The Standards Working Group (Work Plan) agreed that it recommended the introduction of an external whistleblowing hotline.

- RESOLVED:
- 1) The Standards Committee recommends to Cabinet that the Council retains an external provider to operate an external whistleblowing hotline for the Council.
 - 2) The Standards Committee recommends to Cabinet that the draft Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure, as appended to the report, is approved.
 - 3) The Standards Committee recommends to Cabinet that upon the adoption of a new Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure, training on whistleblowing is provided to Councillors and Officers, alongside a campaign to raise awareness of whistleblowing arrangements.

9. PARISH COUNCILLORS AND INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

The Standards Committee was asked to consider the need to recruit Independent Members

and Parish Councillors for appointment to the Standards Committee.

The Committee was reminded of the Terms of Reference of the Standards Committee as set out in Article 10 of the Council's Constitution. There are currently two vacancies on the Committee for Parish Councillors and two vacancies on the Committee for Independent Members.

RESOLVED: That the Standards Committee instructs the Working Group (Work Plan) to:

- 1) Devise and conduct a process for the recruitment of two Parish Councillors and two Independent Members to be recommended for co-option onto the Standards Committee, and
- 2) Following conclusion of the process, the Working Group (Work Plan) brings recommendations to the Standards Committee for appointments by co-option of Parish Councillors and Independent Members of the Standards Committee.

10. TRAINING STRATEGY

The Standards Committee was asked to consider adopting a Training Strategy in relation to Ethical and Governance Matters for all Councillors.

The draft Training Strategy in relation to Ethical and Governance Matters was considered by the Standards Working Group (Work Plan) at its meeting on 2 March 2017. The Working Group felt that the draft Strategy was wide-ranging and supported all topics included within it. The Working Group asked that Councillor training on gifts and hospitality is programmed early in the Councillor Development Programme 2017/2018, in consultation with the Councillor Development Group.

In answer to a query, the definition of gifts and hospitality was provided.

- RESOLVED:
- 1) That the Training Strategy – Ethical and Governance Matters for all Councillors is approved.
 - 2) That The Borough Secretary is instructed to make arrangements for the delivery of training for Members in accordance with the Training Strategy in relation to Ethical and Governance Matters.

The meeting concluded at 5:32 pm