

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Monday, 17 February 2014

PRESENT: Councillor Yates (Chair); Councillor Capstick (Deputy Chair); Councillors Flavell, Oldham and Sargeant

Francis Fernandes; Borough Secretary & Monitoring Officer
Nathan Birch; Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Patel, McGowen and Capstick.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th December 2012 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

3. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES

None received.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

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

None received.

6. OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY ON PERSONAL INTERESTS - DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE

The Borough Secretary & Monitoring Officer submitted the report as set out in the agenda. The new guidance aimed to clarify the situation with regard to declarations of personal/pecuniary interest. With the Committee's approval the advice would be circulated to Councillors and Parish Councils following the meeting.

In response to questions from the Committee the Borough Secretary & Monitoring Officer confirmed that Councillors voting on their own allowance levels would be able to do so, following a dispensation being issued. Dispensations would be issued if the Council would be unable to transact its business due to the level of declarations being made. The Committee was also advised that Councillors who had an interest in more than one property should declare all such properties in their Register of Interests.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted; the guidance is circulated to Councillors and Parish Councils and that openness and transparency on personal interests be included in councillor training for 2015.

7. UPDATE OF LEVEL AND OUTCOMES OF STANDARDS COMPLAINTS

The Borough Secretary & Monitoring Officer submitted the report as set out in the agenda. Due to the anonymous nature of complaints at the investigative stage it was suggested that the Chairman be briefed on the nature of the issues raised as required.

In response to questions from the Committee the Borough Secretary & Monitoring Officer confirmed that matters relating to a specific Council service were outside the scope of the Code of Conduct. As such, these had been referred to the Council's complaints procedure. In relation to potential breaches of the Code of Conduct, only after a robust investigation and a potential breach being established would there be a hearing. The hearing would be in front of a sub-committee of the Standards Committee. This hearing would hear evidence from all parties, including the investigator, and make any findings of breach of the code. If such a breach were to be found the sub-committee could, amongst other things, make recommendations on sanction to the Full Council. Full Council would then have a choice on whether to impose such sanction, but there was no power to suspend or remove a Councillor from office. The Borough Secretary & Monitoring Officer agreed that the timescales for the process needed to be managed closely to allow for a timely conclusion to be reached.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 5:25 pm