



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

BURNLEY TOWN HALL

Monday 24th June 2013

PRESENT MEMBERS

Councillor Royle in the Chair.

Councillors Brindle, Carmichael, Cooper and Kennedy
Gill Smith, Parish Representative

OFFICERS

David Wilcock - Monitoring Officer
Elaine Newsome - Democracy Officer

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Pat Higginbottom – Independent Person

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Alan Ravenscroft, Parish Representative.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the last meeting held on the 23rd January 2013 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Discussion with the Independent Persons

The Chair and Members of the Committee welcomed Mrs Pat Higginbottom to the meeting and requested that she share her experiences of the new Standards regime.

Mrs Higginbottom advised that she thought that the system for dealing with complaint was effective and welcomed the opportunity provided to independent members to be involved at the start of the complaints process, as opposed to the regime of some authorities that solely facilitated an appeals process via the independent persons.

She expressed a view that the mechanisms in place should be seen as a positive action that aimed to offer members of the public confidence in their elected members and prescribe parameters for the conduct of borough and parish Councillors.

On the number of complaints received, it was highlighted that the system used to assess complaints was robust and had worked well, with independent persons considering complaints separately and then meeting with the Monitoring Officer to form a final view. All complaints were considered on the merits of the evidence submitted by complainants and in accordance with the criteria adopted by Council.

Members expressed concern that a number of the complaints received during the last twelve months related to political behaviours and sought assurances that the system allowed for the rejection of vexatious complaints. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the criteria for assessment of complaints specifically referred to the treatment of both politically motivated and vexatious complaints.

**IT WAS
AGREED**

That the comments from the independent person on the complaints system be gratefully received and noted.

The meeting adjourned at 4.50pm and reconvened at 4.55pm.

4. Annual Report of the Standards Committee

The Committee considered a report prepared by the Monitoring Officer that outlined the activities and matters that the Standards Committee had focused on over the past 12 months.

He outlined key areas identified in the report including the number of parish councillors who had yet to fulfil their obligations under the new Standards framework and advised on actions taken to ensure full compliance at the earliest opportunity. Members suggested that a visit to parish councils by the Chair and Monitoring Officer, or alternatively inviting the parish Chairs and clerks to discuss outstanding returns may assist in them identifying ways to ensure full compliance with regulations. It was suggested that a discussion around combining induction and administrative processes at parish levels may provide an opportunity to identify an agreeable solution.

The Committee expressed a view that ensuring transparency at all levels of government was very important to members of the public. In discussing failure to comply with legislative requirements, the Committee highlighted the potential criminal offences and sanctions that may follow a complaint to the police for non-disclosure.

Members welcomed the inclusion of the 7 Nolan Principles as a reminder, to readers, of the standards that all Councillors should consider whilst in public office.

The Annual Report identified a proposed piece of research into the views of the Membership and wider general public on the revised Standards Regime. The Committee confirmed that this would be a useful insight into opinions about the ethical governance framework.

**IT WAS
AGREED**

1. That the Annual Report be submitted to Full Council for consideration.
2. That the Monitoring Officer on behalf of the Chair of Standards contact all parish Councillors who have yet to return their register of interest forms
3. That further consideration is given to the format of a future meeting with parishes around compliance with the registration requirements.

5. Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft work programme for the 2013/14 Municipal Year.

Members discussed:

- The development of a training package focussing on Members conduct, political and civic boundaries;
- Incorporating code of conduct issues into the social media training
- Developing a training package for parish councils that looked at data protection, their personal responsibilities and dual hatted roles

**IT WAS
AGREED**

1. That the work programme be approved subject to the inclusion of the research into views on the operation of the current ethical governance framework and the development of 3 training packages to cover conduct, social media and data protection and regular update reports on complaints;
2. That, following discussion on the future dates of meetings, all remaining meetings of the Standards Committee would take place on Mondays as follows:

Monday 16th September 2013

Monday 25th November 2013

Monday 24th March 2014