

Standards Committee

2 November 2015 – At a meeting of the Committee held at 2.15 p.m. at County Hall, Chichester.

Present: Mrs Arculus (Chairman), Mr Acraman, Mr Barnard, Mr Burrett, Mr Petch, Mr R Rogers, Mr Smith and Mrs Urquhart.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Peters.

In attendance: Mr Diamond (Independent Person)

Declaration of Interest

16. None declared.

Minutes

17. Two minor typographical errors were highlighted in the minutes of the last meeting – that the word 'by' should be corrected to 'be' in minute 9 and 'x' should be corrected to '12' in minute 15.

18. Resolved – That, subject to the corrections in minute 17 above, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 June 2015 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

Officer Codes of Conduct

19. The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law, Assurance and Strategy (copy appended to the signed minutes), which outlined a review undertaken into the ethical policies relating to officers.

20. The report was introduced by the Director of Law, Assurance and Strategy, who reported that the review had been carried out as this had been recommended in a recent audit report. While a comprehensive set of codes existed, general awareness of them and compliance with them had to be re-established.

21. The Committee welcomed the review and highlighted the importance of awareness-raising throughout the Council. It asked that clarification be given in the report to the County Council as to whether all of the officer codes of conduct applied to contractors working for the County Council, and if they didn't, whether it could be written into all future contracts.

22. It was noted that most of the existing officer code of conduct documents did not require amendment, although several amendments were recommended for the Guidance on Propriety and Conduct for Officers:

- Remove the last sentence of the first paragraph under 'Secondary Work' as restrictions and rules can only apply to officers rather than volunteers.

- Under 'Personal Relationships, Elected Members' – the word 'member' should be included in the last sentence of the third paragraph to be consistent with the previous sentence.
- The term 'close relationship' should be more clearly defined under 'Personal Relationships, Other Staff'.
- Under 'offences', the term 'spent' should be clarified. Disclosure of being charged with a criminal offence should be retained, although it was recognised that this had to be treated sensitively by line managers or their line manager in their absence.
- The confidential reporting policy should be mentioned in the section entitled 'Concern about Possible Impropriety from others'.

23. The Committee discussed the current £15 limit for officer gifts and hospitality, which had not been amended for many years. It was noted that the member level for reporting was currently £50. Mr R Rogers proposed £25 as the limit for officer gifts and hospitality, seconded by Mr Smith, which was agreed by a majority.

24. Resolved –

- (1) That the review of officer codes of conduct and the action proposed to raise awareness and improve compliance with them be noted.
- (2) That a revised Guidance on Propriety and Official Conduct for Officer incorporating the amendments agreed in minutes 22 and 23 above be submitted to the County Council on 11 December for approval.

Confidential Reporting Policy

25. The Committee noted a verbal report from the Director of Law, Assurance and Strategy, who reported one referral via this policy, which had been largely inappropriate as it was mostly duplicating an existing grievance process.

Review of Confidential Reporting Policy

26. The Committee received a report by the Director of Law, Assurance and Strategy (copy appended to the signed minutes), which confirmed that the policy had now been promoted via internal communications.

27. The Committee noted that further awareness-raising was being planned, including being part of the next 'Team Talk', a document which is raised in all team meetings.

28. Resolved – That the report be noted.

Independent Person Recruitment

29. The Committee was invited to consider the appointment of Dr Neil Beer and Mr John Donaldson as independent persons to the Standards Committee, following recent interviews by the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and the Director of Law, Assurance and Strategy (biographies appended to the signed minutes).

30. Resolved – That Dr Neil Beer and Mr John Donaldson be appointed as Independent Persons to the Standards Committee.

Independent Persons Conference

31. Mr Diamond advised the Committee that he had attended a training session and conference for independent persons on 17 July 2015. It had been an interesting and informative session, delivered by Wilke and Chapman Solicitors. It was evident that there was a wide variation in how independent persons are used and involved by different Standards Committees and the new regime was still at an early stage. It was hoped that a network of independent persons would be established to assist with future communication and sharing of best practice.

The meeting ended at 3.27 p.m.

Chairman