

BOROUGH OF KETTERING
STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Meeting held: 19th March 2018

Present: Julie Miller (Independent Member - Chair)
Councillor Ruth Groome
Stuart Kilpatrick (Independent Member)
Phil Carter (Independent Member)
Lloyd Landry (Independent Member)

Also Present: Mike Sawford (Independent Person)
Martin Hammond (Executive Director)
Helen Edwards (Head of Democratic and Legal Services)
Anne Ireson (Administrator)

17.STA.07 APOLOGIES

None

17.STA.08 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9th October 2017 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

17.STA.09 URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair accepted an item of urgent business under the provisions of Section 100B 4(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in order to inform members of the Standards Advisory Committee of the extension of the term of office of the Independent Person, which had been carried out under delegated powers pending a report to Council in April 2018.

17.STA.10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

17.STA.11 DESBOROUGH TOWN COUNCIL

A report was submitted which considered the mass resignation of Conservative Group councillors from Desborough Town Council. The committee were advised that an election was expected to be held on 3rd May 2018. In the short term, three temporary councillors had been appointed under the Monitoring Officer's delegated powers, namely:-

Lesley Sambrook Smith (Deputy Chief Executive Officer of NCALC)

Gordon Shorley (Chair of Ashley Parish Council and Vice President of NCALC)

Claire Tilley (Clerk to Cranford Parish Council)

The appointment of temporary councillors would allow the business of the Council to continue until the election. The first meeting had been arranged to take place on Thursday, 22nd March 2018.

Following the May election, all councillors of Desborough Town Council would receive training on the Code of Conduct, the Standards Regime, Communications, and the Freedom of Information Act.

Mr Kevin O'Brien addressed the Committee under the Council's Right to Speak Policy as a resident of Desborough, commenting that he had frequently attended meetings of Desborough Town Council.

Mr O'Brien gave a summary of some of the problems that he perceived had been a factor in the current situation and the mass resignation of Conservative Councillors. He welcomed the proposal for training newly elected councillors, which it was hoped would enable Desborough Town Council to operate in a more transparent manner in future.

RESOLVED (a) that the report of the then Monitoring Officer be noted

(b) that the committee endorse the importance of providing an early training session for all members of the town council after May 3rd elections, which addressed the standards regime, transparency in local government and dealing with difficult meetings.

17.STA.12 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that it involved items of business that included the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraphs 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) relating to an individual; and
- (ii) having considered all the circumstances of the report, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing it.

17.STA.13 COMPLAINT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT BY A MEMBER OF DESBOROUGH TOWN COUNCIL

A report was submitted which considered a complaint that a town council member had been abusive in a meeting.

The Executive Director advised the Committee that, in his then role as Monitoring Officer, he had investigated the complaint. It was clear there had been a history of interpersonal tension within the town council, and in this instance, and in his view, there had been a breach of the Code of Conduct. This view was supported by the Statutory Officers' Group when it met on 30th November and by the Council's Independent Member. In the circumstances of the case he had felt that a full written apology should be offered. This had been done, although the apology had not been accepted by the complainant.

The member in question had resigned from Desborough Town Council on 1st February 2018. Accordingly, the only course of action now open to the Standards Advisory Committee was to note the situation.

During the ensuing debate, the Committee formed the view that the alleged behaviour was unacceptable. It expressed sympathy for the complainant, although it was accepted that it was not now possible for the matter to be referred to a Hearings Panel as the councillor in question had resigned. It was noted there were no other sanctions available to the Committee.

Members expressed frustration at the limitations of the standards regime in not being able to bring this to a conclusion and to do so publicly.

RESOLVED that the Standards Advisory Committee recommend:-

- (i) that training for newly elected members take place swiftly following the May election, ideally before it met for the first time
- (ii) some of the training be bespoke in nature, aimed at addressing previous behaviours, including the potential use of video footage if appropriate.

(The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 7.25 pm)

Signed
Chair

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