

Minutes



Standards Committee

Date: 11 April 2019

Time: 5.30 pm

Present:

P Westwood (Chair), J David, T Britton, A Mitchell, K Watkins and P Worthington, J Owen, Councillor P Hourahine, G Price, (Head of Law & Regulation) Pamela Tasker (Governance Support Officer)

1 Apologies for Absence

None

2 Declarations of Interest

None

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting 17 January 2019

The Minutes of the meeting of 17 January 2019 were submitted.

It was noted that on page 7 of the minutes it should read Councillor rather than Counsellor.

Meetings have taken place on the matters discussed at the previous meeting which were discussed further under Matters Arising.

Agreed:

That the Minutes of the meeting were accepted as a true record.

4 Matters Arising

The Ethical Standards Questionnaire

The Chair confirmed that they had met with the Leader and the Leader of the Opposition to discuss the Ethical Standards Questionnaire. Both Leaders felt that the questionnaire should be circulated again.

Discussion:

It was discussed as to whether the questionnaire should be amended and that one or two new items could be suggested. It was noted that 18 questionnaires have been sent to Heads of Services and 50 were sent to Councillors and only a few responses were received.

- It was noted that Dr Worthington can look at examples of questionnaires completed elsewhere. The Head of Law and Regulation agreed for the open ended questions on the previous questionnaire to be amended.

- During the discussions with the Chair both Leaders agreed that the questionnaire should be resent again due to the current climate. It was discussed as to whether training that Members received was adequate. New Councillors are trained as that was mandatory but ethical standards training must also be attended. This was not a choice and it had to be attended.
- It was reiterated that repeat Councillors appointed must repeat this training every time they are elected. Refresher training must also be attended which was compulsory and was 2-3 sessions. Copies of the slides were sent to Councillors who did not attend.
- It was noted that for the next elections the process will be the same. For those Councillors on a 5 year term it was asked whether there was any benefit of refreshing?
- The training package has been modified due to different case law as the guidance had changed.

It was questioned as to whether any additional questions could be sent to Cabinet members? Also it was discussed as to whether senior officers and members should also be sent questions but maybe further than this such as 3rd and 4th tier?

It was conferred as to whether preferred partners such as Norse should be included but it was stated that procurement was a different process with different issues and was service related and too extensive.

It was noted that when 'ethical standards' was entered into the Cardiff City Council search engine no result was found when searching. Newport.gov.uk is to be redesigned as not fit for purpose at the moment and it would be made more user friendly. The Standards committee has its own section where profiles of standard committee members can be displayed there and this could also be seen on the website.

Out of a possible 68 responses last time the Ethical Standards Questionnaire was circulated, only 18 responses were received. It was now hoped that Members would be encouraged to respond more actively. As it was circulated cold previously, it was hoped for a better response this time.

It was agreed that a composite questionnaire would be formulated and by July 2019 there should be a better response so then the revised questionnaire could then be circulated.

Agreed:

- For members of the Standards Committee to forward questions for the Ethical Standards Questionnaire to the Governance Support Officer, for the attention of the Chair.
- It was agreed that a composite questionnaire would be formulated and by July 2019 a revised questionnaire could then be circulated.
- Questions could also be requested from the 8 Heads of Service and also the 11 members of the senior management team.
- It was commented that the Questionnaire could also be sent to different committees such as Planning and Licensing.

5 Chair's Announcements

None

6 Social Media For Councillors Guidelines

Social Media Guidelines for Councillors was raised at the last committee meeting. Members of the Committee were asked to view the Social Media for Councillors Guidelines document. This was a comprehensive guide showing the pitfalls and the positives of using social media.

It detailed how members could possibly communicate better through social media. It was noted how some closed websites around Newport could cause problems to an individual but that a private Facebook account was a different matter and at the discretion of the individual.

Councillors adhere to a code of conduct and there is a Newport City Council IT policy as to how members and staff should use the Councils IT system etc.

However the guidance is for how to use mobile phones and it was not council policy to advise on social media. The promotion on good behaviour is in the code of conduct and behaviour on social media comes back to the code of conduct.

It was agreed that the Social Media Guidelines was quite a comprehensive document.

It was questioned as to whether social media use was being covered in training. It was confirmed that Members induction training pointed towards it.

It was announced that Ms Britton intended to attend Council on the 30th April 2019 to make Council aware of what the Standards Committee undertakes. The Democracy and Communication Manager would be sending a letter to the Mayor to inform the meeting of Ms Britton's attendance.

7 Complaints

The Head of Law & Regulation informed the committee that there had been four complaints- two complaints which have not been accepted for formal investigation and two pending complaints.

It was stated that a common theme of complaints was the way members dealt with issues raised by constituents and members not replying to constituents. It was noted that how they conduct themselves is not the Ombudsman's function.

One particular complaint was received today and was a complaint on how members dealt with issues raised by constituents.

It will reported to the Committee in July on the outcome of these complaints.

It was explained that the constituent who made the complaint thought that their particular point was correct and that it was a case of the particular Councillor not agreeing with them. The Councillor may have been bombarded by texts, calls etc from the constituent and then the constituent made a complaint which was a difficult situation.

8 Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 11 July 2019 at 5.30pm in Committee Room 1, Civic Centre.