

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

31 October 2023 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Huntley (Chair), May (Vice-Chair), Ayling, Batley, Kelly, Purser, Turner, Woodman and (Amelia) Worne

Also present were Independent Persons Mr John Cooke, Mr John Thompson and Mrs Sandra Prail.

332. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lloyd.

333. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

334. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2023 were approved by the Committee. These would be signed after the meeting.

335. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA WHICH THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

There were no urgent matters for this meeting.

336. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No public questions had been submitted for this meeting.

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337. MONITORING OFFICER REPORT - OCTOBER 2023

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report, explaining there had not been significant change since the last meeting. He highlighted that although Councillor Goodheart was still showing as not trained to sit on the Licensing Committee, he was booked onto a course due to take place on 02 November 2023.

Councillor Woodman believed she had attended the Code of Conduct training, however this was not reflected in the training matrix. The Monitoring Officer agreed to look into this.

The Committee noted the report.

338. MEMBER LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report, explaining that the Member Induction Programme was now complete with the exception of Council and Committee Procedure Training which would take place on 02 November 2023, and Chair/Vice-Chair Training which would take place on 09 November 2023. All Members were welcome to attend both of these training sessions. A questionnaire regarding the Induction Programme had been circulated to Members, and although the response rate of only 11 Councillors was disappointing, it did provide a sample of views to work from. Feedback from the questionnaire had been largely positive and anecdotal feedback from Councillors at the time of training had also been generally positive.

Of the 11 Councillors that had completed the questionnaire, 8 had confirmed they were very satisfied with the induction programme, with 5 of these confirming that the topics covered were very relevant to their role as a Councillor, 4 said relevant and one confirmed a neutral response. Most Members confirmed that they found the Information Technology sessions the most informative, followed by the Member/Officer training carried out by South East Employers, with 2 confirming that the session on 11 May – Introduction to the organisation by the Corporate Management Team to have been the most useful. When asked what additional topics they would like to have seen covered, suggestions included: safeguarding training (it was acknowledged that this was being addressed); visiting the recycling centre (this had taken place); Chairs training session (this would take place on 9 November 2023); GDPR (this would be addressed by the Monitoring Officer as a matter of priority); general training covering who to contact for resident issues (this information was covered in the welcome pack provided to Members in terms of contacts and department roles etc, however Members should contact the Monitoring Officer or Group Heads if they still needed help with this); climate change; a tour around the District (a bus tour of housing sites took place on 20 October for all Members). All Members were satisfied with the timings of the sessions, but 4 also stated they would like different options on timings. All apart from one confirmed that the duration of each of the sessions was perfect. Other comments included that the questionnaire be sent out after each induction session held; hard copies of presentations to be provided in advance; in-person training was positive.

When asked 'How satisfied were you with the induction programme?' 5 were extremely satisfied, 5 satisfied and 1 not so satisfied.

The Monitoring Officer explained that he had wanted as many Members as possible to be present for the training sessions, and it was felt in-person training had been very beneficial. He was reluctant to start sending out full presentations in advance of sessions, as there were concerns this could lead to reduced attendance. It may be that having print-outs available at the session would be a suitable alternative.

The Chair then invited questions from Members. One Member stated that the Customer Services tour had been outstanding, as had the Housing bus tour, which he felt could also incorporate additional sites as well as the housing in future.

The Committee noted the report and the current progress of the Member Induction Programme and Member learning and development more generally.

339. RECRUITMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report, explaining the Council were statutorily obliged to appoint at least one Independent Person (IP). IPs' views were sought and taken into account by the Monitoring Officer and/or Standards Committee when a decision was taken on an allegation under the Members' Code of Conduct. Their views may also be sought by the Monitoring Officer and/or Standards Committee at any other stage in the procedure when a complaint of a breach of the Code was considered, or by the Councillor facing the allegation. IPs could not be employees of the Council or Councillors. They were invited to attend meetings of the Standards Committee in an advisory, non-voting capacity. The Council appointed its IPs for a maximum of four years and currently had three IPs. John Thompson was appointed in July 2019 and Sandra Prail and John Cooke were appointed in July 2020, with their terms all ending on 14 July 2024. The process by which the Council appointed IPs was much like recruiting for jobs.

The Monitoring Officer explained he wished to run the recruitment process from January to recruit IPs for a 4 year term. He highlighted paragraph 4.6 of the report. On the last occasion recruitment took place, the interview panel consisted of two Members of the Committee, an existing IP and the Monitoring Officer. Following the interviews carried out by the panel, the Committee then made a recommendation to Full Council. It was recommended that the same approach was to be taken on this occasion but with one additional Committee Member added to the panel – making five members of the interview panel in total. This process would be undertaken in other districts and boroughs, as all of the West Sussex districts and boroughs were required to appoint IPs. The Monitoring Officer recommended exploring a joint recruitment process alongside any other willing districts and boroughs with a view to widening the pool of potential applications and sharing the cost. The report requested authorisation for the Monitoring Officer to prepare an application pack to be brought back to Committee 18 January 2024, and also to explore the recruiting jointly with other West Sussex district and borough councils.

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The Chair then invited questions from Members. One Member raised a discussion that had taken place at Full Council regarding recruiting all three IPs at the same time, during which it was suggested the consequence of this was that all experience and knowledge was lost in one go, and it had been suggested at Full Council consideration should be given to this being staggered. The Monitoring Officer explained that staggering recruitment in such a way would mean they were almost always going through the detailed recruitment process, which would be at additional cost, however it was for the Committee to decide on the process. Another Member asked whether the existing IPs could reapply, which the Monitoring Officer confirmed they could.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Purser and seconded by Councillor Turner.

The Committee

RESOLVED that

- 1 having considered the report, the recruitment process that it wants the Council to undertake in relation to its three Independent Persons, as presented in the report, be agreed;
- 2 the Group Head of Law & Governance be authorised to prepare the application pack detailed within the report and bring documentation to the 18 January 2024 meeting of the Committee for approval;
- 3 the Group Head of Law & Governance be authorised to explore recruiting jointly with other West Sussex district and borough councils.

340. REGISTER OF ASSESSMENTS OF COMPLAINTS AGAINST COUNCILLORS

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report, explaining that this was a regular report to the Committee that had been appropriately anonymised. He reminded the Committee that the reference numbers were not a date, but the municipal year and complaint number. The table showed three complaints, of which two had been found as no breach during the informal stage of the process and there was no need for informal resolution. The third complaint had gone through initial informal assessment, the Independent Person had been consulted, and the subject member had been informed that the matter should be dealt with by informal resolution in the form of an apology.

There were no questions from Members.

The Committee noted the report.

341. WORK PROGRAMME

The Monitoring Officer presented the Work Programme to the Committee explaining that he wished to add an additional item for the January meeting for Committee to review the Local Assessment Procedures.

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

(The meeting concluded at 6.31 pm)