
Standards Committee

Report of the meeting held on 6th December 2012

Matters for Information

13. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS AND TOWN AND PARISH COUNCIL

Since their appointment by the Council, the Committee has noted that the Lead and Deputy Independent Persons have begun to lend their support to the Monitoring Officer in responding to the new requirements of the Localism Act 2011 and its impact on the standards process.

Both have observed training sessions on the Code of Conduct held for Town & Parish Councils, attended a workshop for Independent Persons and indicated their willingness to attend alternate meetings of the Committee to keep apprised of standards issues. The Lead Independent Person has also reviewed the first complaint received under the new arrangements. The Committee has accepted that, with experience, working practices will continue to evolve and may ultimately require the need for some adjustment to be made to the protocol for the consideration of complaints.

Following the decision to appoint two town and parish council representatives to the Committee, the Chairman reported that he had, together with the Monitoring Officer considered expressions of interest received from seven high quality candidates. The positions will be offered to the two successful candidates who will serve until April 2014 and be entitled to receive an allowance of £231 per annum plus reimbursement of the costs involved in attending meetings of the Committee and training events. Both appointees will be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee

14. UPDATE ON CODE OF CONDUCT AND REGISTER OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS (DPIs)

As the Monitoring Officer retains a duty to maintain and publish a register of interests of Members and co opted Members of the District and all Parish Councils in Huntingdonshire, the Committee has noted the current position on the return of individual DPIs and publication of Registers. Although there is no legal obligation upon the Town and Parish Councils to notify the Monitoring Officer, the Committee has been advised that 51 (of 71 Town and Parish Councils) have adopted a Code based on that published by the District Council with eleven opting for the Code promoted by the National Association of Local

Councils. Whilst the Monitoring Officer has exercised some leniency in the early stages of this exercise, the Committee has taken the view that it is now appropriate to write, in stronger terms, to those Councils where DPIs are still outstanding to point out their legal obligation to comply. The Committee also has suggested that the Monitoring Officer should call on the assistance of District Councillors in these circumstances to encourage parish councils in their wards to return their DPIs and adopt a Code of Conduct where this appears still to be outstanding.

15. TRAINING UPDATE

The Committee has noted the response received to the eight training sessions held for District and Town and Parish Councillors over the period September – November 2012. Although, overall attendance was disappointing, feedback received during and since the sessions has been very positive and a number of challenging issues had been raised in discussion. Given the level of interest shown subsequently by individual Parish Councils, there appears to be an opportunity to extend the training elsewhere in the District in the future and indeed one session was held recently specifically for Hilton Parish.

16. UPDATE ON COMPLAINTS RECEIVED SINCE 1ST JULY 2012

The Monitoring Officer reported to the Committee that he had reviewed, after consultation with the Council's appointed Independent Person, the first complaint received in accordance with the protocol adopted by the Council to deal with Code of Conduct complaints under the Localism Act. Having been apprised of the allegations in brief, the Committee has noted that there was insufficient evidence to substantiate the complaint and to warrant the undertaking of a formal investigation.

17. COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

The Committee has noted, with interest, the views recently expressed by the 'Committee on Standards in Public Life' in relation to changes to the local government standards regime resulting from the Localism Act 2011. Whilst commending the decision to operate standards at local level and to maintain a mandatory requirement for each authority to retain a code of conduct based on the Nolan principles, the Committee had expressed strong concerns at the absence of adequate sanctions to apply to those Councillors who fall short of the standards expected of an elected Member.

A Hansard
Chairman