
DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

11 JUNE 2015

Present -

MEMBERS:

Borough Councillors: Councillor Taylor (Chairman), Maddern and Matthews

TOWN AND PARISH COUNCIL CO-OPTED REPRESENTATIVES:

Councillor McCarthy (Aldbury Parish Council)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Michael Nidd

OFFICERS:

Steven Baker, Assistant Director (Chief Executive's Unit)
Trudi Coston, Member Support Officer

The meeting began at 7.30 pm.

1. ELECT A CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Councillor Maddern and seconded by Councillor Matthews to nominate Councillor Taylor to become Chairman of the Standards Committee.

Councillor Taylor asked the committee members and the officers to introduce themselves and give a brief overview of their background.

S Baker advised that Michael Nidd had been invited to observe the meeting as he had expressed an interest in the two vacant positions for Independent Members.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2015 were confirmed by the Members present and then signed by the Chairman.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Rachel Keil (Independent Person). S Baker advised that Rachel was not a member of the committee yet she always attends these meetings and has never missed one before.

4. INTRODUCTION TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

S Baker drew attention to the various documents in the agenda and said that members should keep these as a record to refer back to. He referred to recommendation 2 on page 3 of the agenda (relating to the appointment of a sub-committee to shortlist and interview candidates for the independent member vacancies) and advised that the advert was currently in Dacorum Digest with a closing date of 29 June. Interviews would take place with the Sub-Committee between 30 June and 9 July, and the chosen candidates would be recommended for appointment at the Full Council meeting on 15 July.

Councillor McCarthy felt that five was a large number for a sub-committee. S Baker advised it was a recommendation from the previous committee which could be amended. He advised that the number of members on sub-committee should remain an odd number.

Councillor Taylor said he had chaired interviews in the past with just two others and felt three people was sufficient. He suggested the members of the committee would be sufficient.

It was proposed by Councillor Maddern, seconded by Councillor Matthews and agreed that the three members of standards committee be appointed as the sub-committee. Cllr Maddern and Cllr Mathews then indicated that they would be happy for Cllr Taylor to shortlist and interview the candidates with Mr Baker.

S Baker explained the report detailed information about the Code of Conduct, and one of the committee's functions was to keep the code under review and recommend any changes to full council. He said that not every council has the same code as it is a very local code and it may be very different to other councils. He advised that the parish code may also be different.

Councillor Matthews asked if they would be expected to be involved in the parish code. S Baker advised the law states the Borough Council must put in place a process for dealing with complaints and must have an independent person involved. The Council's complaints process must also apply to Town and Parish Councils. He said all complaints about parish and town councillors would come to us and be processed by us.

Councillor Maddern said she was a member of Nash Mills Parish Council and asked if that could be a problem. S Baker advised she would need to declare an interest if it involved a Nash Mills Parish Councillor and would not be able to take part in the discussions.

S Baker advised that there were three times more Town and Parish Councillors than Borough Councillors so that there was the potential for a lot more complaints about Town and Parish Councillors than Borough Councillors. He explained that he had to initially assess each complaint in consultation with the Independent Person and make a decision to ensure it was justified before escalating it any further. He referred to page 35 of the agenda where details of the standards complaints assessment criteria could be found.

S Baker explained that a complaint was often about a decision rather than behaviour, and a simple apology is often satisfactory. He said it can sometimes be more serious and would need to be escalated to a standards hearing. The Independent Person would need to be present and be satisfied that it was being dealt with properly. He explained it was down to the committee to promote and maintain high standards and keep the code fit for purpose.

S Baker referred to recommendation 3 and proposed that the next meeting date be used for training purposes. He planned to use the scenarios from the previous standards training in January. He hoped the vacant positions would be appointed by then so that the full committee could all be trained at the same time.

Councillor Matthews asked if the complaints that just required an apology would be covered in the training. S Baker said he could cover the wider process but the session would be focussed on a hearing as this would be when members of the committee would become involved..

Councillor McCarthy suggested it was down to good mediation skills. S Baker said it was good to resolve a complaint informally if possible but each case should be dealt with properly and transparently.

Councillor Taylor explained that to an aggrieved person something can seem serious, however just an acknowledgment and an apology can sometimes resolve the issue.

S Baker used a previous complaint he had dealt with as an example of why a complainant could be asked for evidence to ensure the matter was justified.

Councillor Taylor said members should use the information in the agenda as a reference manual for the future.

S Baker asked members to read pages 25-39 prior to the training as it sets out the procedure for complaints.

Councillor Matthews asked if was possible to have electronic copies of the documents in the agenda. S Baker agreed he would email the members with copies. He advised that the Code of Conduct could be found in the Constitution on the DBC website.

Councillor Taylor advised that all members should soon have iPad's and should be trying to keep paper limited as most documents were available electronically.

Outcome:

Recommendation 1: The report was noted.

Recommendation 2: Councillors Taylor, Maddern and Matthews were appointed as the sub-committee. Councillors Maddern and Mathews were happy to delegate to Cllr Taylor the shortlisting and interviewing of the candidates for Independent Members with Mr Baker.

Recommendation 3: The next meeting date will be used for standards training.

S Baker to email members copies of the documents that were in the agenda.

5. DATE OF NEXT STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 17 September 2015. This will be used for Standards training.

The meeting ended at 8:03 pm.