



Minutes of the meeting of the **Standards Committee** held in the Committee Rooms, East Pallant House on Tuesday 30 May 2023 at 1.00 pm

Members present: Ms M Corfield (Chair), Mr S Boulcott, MX R Chant, Mr C Todhunter and Mr J Vivian

Parish representatives present:

Independent Members present:

Not present: Mr R Briscoe and Mr J Cross

Officers present all items: Mrs L Baines (Democratic Services Manager) and Mr N Bennett (Divisional Manager for Democratic Services)

1 **Chair's Announcements**

Cllr Corfield welcomed all those present and those watching online.

Apologies for absence were received for Cllr Briscoe and Cllr Cross.

2 **Approval of Minutes**

Mr Bennett explained that as the members of the Committee were not present at the previous meeting he could confirm that no concerns had been raised about the minutes and as such members could vote to approve if they chose to do so.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Standards Committee held on 25 January 2021 be approved as a correct record.

3 **Declarations of Interests**

Mr Andrews, one of the council's Independent Persons was present and wished to declare a pecuniary interest in agenda item 6 as an Independent Person.

4 **Public Question Time**

There were no public questions.

5 **Review of past complaint numbers**

Mr Bennett was invited to outline the item. He explained that there are two main types of complaint. The first being informal. Those complaints are received by email or during conversation. The second type of complaint is formal where a formal complaints form is submitted.

For informal complaints correspondence is held between Mr Bennett and the complainant. This is stored on the council's IKEN system with limited access rights.

For formal complaints correspondence is recorded. This includes whether it is a district or parish councillor complaint, a summary of the complaint, the date it was received, the date the matter closed, when and which Independent Person was notified and the outcome and any sanction.

Since January 2023 there have been nine formal complaints and 15 informal complaints (one of which turned into a formal complaint).

Mr Bennett explained that 70% of complaints related to Social Media. He then outlined the nature of the other cases.

Cllr Corfield thanked Mr Bennett for the report.

6 **Independent Persons Payment**

Cllr Corfield confirmed that she had agreed for Mr Andrews to remain at the table to answer members questions during the introduction of the item before leaving the room for the debate.

Mr Bennett was then invited to outline the item. He explained that the post of the Independent Person had been expanded through time. It acts as an advisory to the Monitoring Officer for complaints as an external perspective. He confirmed that members are able to approach one of the Independent Persons for advice. This has now been extended to complainants too.

Cllr Corfield then invited Mr Andrews to speak. He outlined his experience in public sector governance and his role as a sounding board to the Monitoring Officer. He then invited members questions.

Cllr Todhunter asked how much time was spent on the role. Mr Andrews explained that every complaint is different and can range from an hour to a number of hours. Mr Bennett added that one case had produced 130 pages for the Independent Person to read.

Mr Andrews was then invited to leave the room as there were no further questions for him.

Cllr Corfield commented that the role of the Independent Person requires a high level attention to detail and communication skills which should be recognised.

Cllr Chant asked whether there had been a precedence set for Independent Persons payments and whether a payment would be per case, per hour, per page or a salary per annum. Mr Bennett explained that there is a precedent for payment and that the council and one other authority are the only ones in the area that do not provide payment. The total is usually an amount in the hundreds of pounds region.

Cllr Todhunter asked whether the Independent Persons can claim expenses, how they would be paid, whether they would have the option to decline and whether it could be backdated. Mr Bennett explained that expenses are offered but often petrol/travel claims are not made. Any payment would be made through the Payroll system and would be optional. He explained that backdating was unlikely to be possible however an honorarium one off payment maybe possible should members wish to recommend that onto Council.

Cllr Vivian asked whether it was possible to reflect an Independent Person's experience through a pay scale. Mr Bennett explained that it was more likely to be an annual payment.

Cllr Chant asked how an honorarium would be calculated. Mr Bennett explained he would need to consider that if it were recommended but clarified that the top end of an honorarium would not normally exceed £1000.

Cllr Corfield asked Mr Bennett to sum up. Mr Bennett explained that members could vote to recommend to Council that the Independent Persons receive an annual payment. If that were not carried another idea would be voted on. If it were carried members could then vote on whether to recommend one off honorariums to the current and recent Independent Persons.

In a vote the members agreed to the annual payment.

In a further vote members agreed to honorarium payments.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

That the Standards Committee recommends the following to Full Council:

1. That the Monitoring Officer be tasked with providing costing options to Full Council for the Independent Persons to receive an annual payment (stipend) in line with local authority rates.
2. That the Monitoring Officer be further tasked with providing costings to Full Council for the Independent Persons current and recent to receive honorarium payments in line with local authority rates.

7 Late Items

The Monitoring Officer invited by the Cllr Corfield asked members if they wished a further meeting to be convened to discuss the procedure of Sub-Committees. Members were in favour of the proposal.

RESOLVED

That a meeting of the Standards Committee be convened at a time agreeable to the Chair of the Committee to discuss the procedural arrangements for Standards Sub-Committees.

8 Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no requirement to exclude the press and the public.

The meeting ended at 2.02 pm

CHAIRMAN

Date: