

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 9TH OCTOBER 2014 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors B. T. Cooper (Chairman), M. A. Bullivant (Vice-Chairman), D. W. P. Booth, R. J. Shannon, C. J. Spencer, L. J. Turner, Mr. J. Cypher and Mr. I. A. Hodgetts

Parish Councils' Representatives: Mr. I. A. Hodgetts and Mr. J. Cypher

Officers: Mrs. C. Felton, Mrs. S. Sellers and Ms. D. Parker-Jones

1/14 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED that Councillor B. T. Cooper be elected Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year.

2/14 **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED that Councillor M. A. Bullivant be elected Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year.

3/14 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C. M. McDonald and C. R. Scurrall.

Members expressed their thanks to Councillor M. S. Sherrey, former member and outgoing Chairman of the Committee, for her work on the Committee.

4/14 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were declared.

5/14 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 9th January 2014 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

MONITORING OFFICER'S REPORT

Member Complaints

Following previous requests from Members, the Monitoring Officer explained that general background information in relation to the complaints received since January had been included in her report. This would allow the Committee to identify any complaint trends which might be emerging.

A Member queried whether it would be possible for the MO to advise who a complaint had been made by; either another councillor or a member of the public, and whether this had been made by a persistent complainant. Conversely, another Member felt that such information should not be disclosed.

The MO stated that, at the training session which had taken place immediately preceding the meeting that evening, she had been asked by some Members to look at whether she could confirm which category complainants fell into. This information was not disclosed at present and the MO agreed to consider this as part of the wider constitution review work which she was currently undertaking.

One of the Parish Representatives highlighted that the majority of the complaints received during January to August 2014 were against parish councillors, which presented a somewhat different picture than had previously been the case. As this was the first time the Parish Representatives had been made aware of the complaints, and as there were a number of issues linked with these, it was queried whether the MO could share relevant complaint info periodically with the Parish Representatives when meetings of the Committee were not proceeding. The Parish Representative added that he felt there should be some reinforcement at the Bromsgrove Area Committee of the County Association of Local Councils (CALC) meetings of the work the MO was carrying out on parish councillor complaints, with the Parish Representatives being keen to do whatever they could to assist the MO in promoting this. The issue of possible training needs linked with complaints against parish councillors and the Code of Conduct also arose, which it was felt CALC might wish to consider.

The MO agreed that the need to have regular MO's reports detailing complaints received and action taken on these was a valid point. She stated that when the regime changed in 2012 there had been very little detail from central government as to what had been expected of local authorities moving forward, and she was unsure as to whether the current committee system was appropriate as the role of the Standards Committee was not proving to be as effective as had previously been the case, with a number of meetings having been cancelled owing to lack of business. As such, the Constitution Review Group was keen to look at this issue.

The MO added that initially under the new regime more complaints had been made against district councillors. A number of parish council issues had recently arisen which she had liaised with Richard Levett, Executive Officer of

the Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils, on, and for which Mr Levett had been very supportive. The government had changed the role of parish representatives on standards committees under the new regime, meaning it was difficult for the MO to provide the parish representatives with any additional complaint information over and above that which was presented to the Committee.

The MO agreed to forward all Members' views to the Constitutional Review Group, the membership of which included all of the political Group Leaders. She requested that district councillors feed through any views that they regarding the reporting of complaints to their Group Leader, in order that they could have their collective Group views on this. Equally, any parish council views should be routed via the MO, which she would then take back to the Constitutional Review Group.

All present agreed that there should be regular reporting of complaints by the MO to Members and that there should be the opportunity for Members of the Committee to discuss this information. It was therefore agreed that the meetings of the Standards Committee scheduled for January and March 2015 would proceed. As the new regime had now been in place for just over 2 years Officers agreed to provide to the January meeting information on the general numbers of complaints received under the new regime, together with any emerging trends with these and details as to how the complaints were resolved.

Member Training

The MO reported that it had unfortunately not been possible to proceed with the Chairing Skills training as the trainer has been taken ill a few hours before the training was due to start. Officers were in the process of re-arranging the session, which Members requested take place as soon as practicable.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents of the report be noted;
- (b) that the meetings of the Standards Committee scheduled to take place in January and March 2015 proceed in order that the Monitoring Officer report on any Member complaints received during those periods; and
- (c) the Monitoring Officer take to the January 2015 meeting details of the Members complaints received under the new regime, such details to include the number of complaints, any emerging trends and how the complaints were resolved.

7/14

PARISH COUNCILS' REPRESENTATIVES' REPORT

The Parish Representative thanked the Monitoring Officer (MO) and her colleagues for the work they had undertaken on the parish council complaints.

He stated that he would like to think that he and the other Parish Representatives could help the parish councils affected, and assist in reinforcing any messages which the MO wished to send out to the parishes. He felt there might be merit in reporting to the parish councils, via a future

meeting of the Bromsgrove Area Committee of the Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils (CALC), relevant messages from the MO, and to generate interest on any relevant training which might be helpful to the parishes.

He added that the December CALC meeting would likely be too late to seek the parishes' views on the issue raised under the MO's report on the reporting of Member complaints. As such, he agreed to issue a note to the parish councils on this and to report back any responses to the MO for her to feed into the Constitution Review Group.

RESOLVED that the update provided and action to be undertaken by the Parish Councils' Representative in relation to complaint reporting be noted.

8/14

LOCALISM ACT 2011 - STANDARDS REGIME - DISPENSATIONS

The Committee received a report which sought the grant of a dispensation under s33 of the Localism Act 2011 to enable a Member to participate and vote in matters detailed in the appendix to the report. The report also sought the removal of a Member from the list of previously approved dispensations as the Member in question was no longer a trustee of the organisation.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Standards Committee grant a dispensation under section 33 (2) of the Localism Act 2011 to allow Councillor Keith Grant-Pearce to participate in and vote at Council and committee meetings in debates concerning the Artrix Theatre generally, but not in relation to funding issues;
- (b) that the dispensation referred to at (a) above be valid until the first Standards Committee meeting after the local elections in 2015; and
- (c) the dispensation previously granted to Councillor Jonathan Boulter in relation to the Artrix Operating Trust be removed as he is no longer a Trustee of the Trust.

9/14

WORK PROGRAMME

As discussed earlier in the meeting under the Monitoring Officer's Report (Minute No. 6/14 refers) it was noted that the meetings of the Committee scheduled for 15th January and 17th March 2015 would proceed in order for the Monitoring Officer to update Members on any complaints received.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme be approved.

The meeting closed at 6.32 p.m.

Chairman