

JOINT STANDARDS COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE

Date: 26 September 2016

Venue: East Northamptonshire House, Cedar Drive, Thrapston

Time: 7.30pm

Present: East Northamptonshire Councillors:

Rosalie Beattie

David Jenney

Andy Mercer

Gill Mercer

Valerie Raven-Hill

Town and Parish Councillors:

Fiona Cowan

Derek Lawson

Dave Mundy

Roy Sparkes

Robert Tyman

Arthur Whittaker

(Collyweston Parish Council)

(High Ferrers Town Council)

(Stanwick Parish Council)

(Oundle Town Council)

(Raunds Town Council)

(Yarwell Parish Council)

Vivienne Barnard

Andrew Sortwell

Independent Person

Reserve Independent Person

190. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE 2016/17 MUNICIPAL YEAR

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Andy Mercer be elected as Chairman of the Committee for the 2015/16 Municipal Year

191. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE 2016/17 MUNICIPAL YEAR

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Arthur Whittaker be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the 2016/17 Municipal Year

192. REAPPOINTMENT OF THE INDEPENDENT PERSON AND RESERVE INDEPENDENT PERSON

It was noted that Vivienne Barnard had been reappointed Independent Person and that Andrew Sortwell reserve Independent Person at the previous Council . The Chairman, Councillor A Mercer, paid tribute to their high quality and professional approach to the role and welcomed their reappointment.

193. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Joint Standards Complaints Committee held on 29 February 2016, 23 March 2016 and 28 July 2016 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

194. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Marika Hillson and Colin Wright.

195. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sparks advised that he had an interest in one aspect of the Monitoring Officer's report

196. QUESTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 10.3

There were no questions submitted under Procedure Rule 10.3.

197. REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

There were no dispensation requests.

198. ACTIVITY REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report outlining activity in relation to the Standards Framework covering the period from the last meeting of the Committee in March 2016 to date. She also provided the Committee with further information detailing the number of town and parish councils that either published their register of interest forms on their website or provided a link to the forms on the East Northamptonshire Council website.

Committee members discussed the information provided and asked if there were factors to be considered, such as training needs, in addressing those councils that had not published the information.

Further to the previous report, the Committee was advised that all district councillors had returned their register of interest forms and that 99% of town and parish councillors had completed and returned their register at the time of writing the report.

It had not been possible to provide a complete estimate of the number of enquiries received since the previous meeting due to a change in support staff. However it was reported that now a total of ten code of conduct complaints had been received in respect of the same parish council. All ten had had initial assessments issued. Seven had been referred for further investigation, two required no further action and one required an advisory letter from the Monitoring Officer.

Questions were asked about the Council's budget for code of conduct investigations, and about the need for consistency in assessing code of conduct complaints. The Monitoring Office gave details of the procedure for drawing down funds to cover investigations and confirmed that the county wide Monitoring Officers' Group that met regularly included shared learning so as to achieve consistency where possible, given that there were different codes in operation.

The Monitoring Officer concluded her report by giving some useful feedback on a Standards conference that she had recently attended and announcing that a Code of Conduct training session was to be held in Oundle on 27 October 2016, specifically aimed at new councillors but all councillors were welcome to attend. There would also be a sub-regional training session for Independent Persons during November 2016.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

Chairman