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STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 April 2015 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Independent Members of the Standards Committee: Dr Jonathan Sexton (Chairman); Mrs Janet Bacon (Vice Chairman); Mr Dennis James (Independent Person); Mr Peter Tucker (substitute Independent Person);
Councillors: D Green, Grove, Nicholson, H Scobie, M Tomlinson, Lawson (Broadstairs Town Council) and Way (Monkton Parish Council)

In Attendance:

91. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Marson and Roberts.

92. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was proposed by the Chairman and AGREED that the minutes of the meeting of 16 September 2014 be approved and signed by the Chairman subject to the following changes:

Mrs Bacon should be listed as Independent Member and not as Councillor and that Mr James (Independent Person) was present.

93. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

94. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman thanked the Committee Members for their attendance at the meeting during election period.

The Chairman outlined the report.

The Chairman highlighted that a full range of sanctions could be considered in future Standards complaint cases.

He did not advocate the employment of sanctions and felt that building respectful relationships was reinforced by training. He advised that other (in some cases, larger) councils had more developed whipping systems within their political groups and that this could be effective.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that sanctions did not need to be written into the Constitution and appropriate sanctions would be used on a case by case basis.

The Chairman invited Committee Members' questions.

Concerns were raised by the Committee that the figures show that complaints were not being investigated quickly enough. Concerns were also raised that the Standards Committee had not met many times in 2014-2015.

The Chairman asked the Monitoring Officer to respond to this concern. The Monitoring Officer advised that there were a number of reasons why the process for Standards complaints had taken time but in the future it is anticipated that a formal timescale will be set for investigations to be completed.

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that in relation to a couple of matters there had been delays in finding investigators for the outstanding investigations but that investigators had now been identified.

The Monitoring Officer addressed the recent lack of meetings. He updated the Committee regarding progress of work being done by the Centre for Public Scrutiny to the Member/Officer Protocol and the Constitution.

It was reported that the work on the Member/Officer Protocol would be presented to the Improvement Board on 10 April 2015 prior to being dealt with at this committee. It was anticipated that this work would be a precursor to a full review of the Constitution which has now been commissioned.

These matters will be before the Standards Committee early in the new Council year as well as the Constitution Review Working Party.

The Committee also made some small contextual changes to the report.

Committee Members thanked the Chairman for his work in the last year.

The Committee discussed and noted the report.

95. STANDARDS COMPLAINT STATISTICS

The Committee noted the Standards Complaint Statistics report.

Meeting concluded : 7.45 pm