

STANDARDS

7.00 pm, Tuesday, 23 July 2013

- Present:-** Councillor Mrs Sandra Hambleton – in the Chair
- Councillors Mrs Beech, Mrs Cornes and Mrs Heesom
- In attendance:-** David Wood (Independent Person) and Town Councillor Geoff Locke (Kidsgrove Town Council)
- Officers:-** Liz Dodd (Audit Manager and Monitoring Officer) and Nick Lamper (Senior Member Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors George Cairns and John Cooper, and Parish Councillor Graham Sedgley.

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Beech and Cornes declared personal interests in item 8 as members of Audley Parish Council, and took no part in its consideration; Councillor Olszewski declared a personal interest in item 11 as one of the applicants was a former colleague, and took no part in its consideration.

4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL LETTER ARRANGEMENTS

A report was submitted outlining recent changes in the way that the Local Government Ombudsman Service (LGO) dealt with complaints and the publication of its decisions.

In previous years, the LGO had provided an annual summary of complaints received against the council. This annual letter had covered a 12-month period from April to March and included statistics on the number of enquiries and complaints received by the LGO Advice Team.

This year the LGO would not produce annual letters for individual councils about complaints received against them in the same way it had done in previous years. This was because part way through the year, the LGO had begun to make changes in the way it handled complaints, and therefore it was felt that any statistics would not provide a comparable picture throughout the year. However, complaint outcomes from April 2012 to March 2013 showed that no reports had been issued against this council.

Instead, the LGO would be sending a letter to all councils which would include high level information about complaints which had been made and also give the council the opportunity to contribute to a consultation on what annual letters would look like in the future and how they could better meet the council's needs. This letter had

been received shortly after the publication of the agenda for the meeting and had been circulated prior to the meeting.

The LGO would also be publishing all of the decisions on complaints it received after 1 April 2013, making it the first public sector Ombudsman scheme to do so. Decision statements would be published on the LGO website no earlier than three months after the date of the final decision. The information published would not name the complainant or any individual involved with the complaint. A small number of examples of decisions on complaints received before 1 April 2013 would also be published.

In pursuance of being an open and accountable service with transparent decision making processes, the LGO would publish its decisions so that the public and bodies within its jurisdiction could see the full range of decisions and feel reassured that they were fair, thorough and impartial.

Publishing decisions also recognised the key role the LGO played in helping to ensure that public services were accountable to the public who used and funded those services. Greater transparency of the LGO's decisions meant greater transparency of public services.

The LGO did, however, retain discretion not to publish a decision – for example where it would not be in the interests of the person complaining to publish or where there was a reason in law not to.

Resolved:

- (1) That the new arrangements be noted; and
- (2) That the Annual Review Letter be circulated to all members of the council along with an explanation of the changes.

5. OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY ON PERSONAL INTERESTS - A GUIDE FOR COUNCILLORS - REVISED GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE

The above guidance, which had been issued in March 2013 by the Department of Communities and Local Government to supersede that issued in August 2012, was submitted. It was reported that the guidance would be circulated to all members of the council.

Resolved: That the content of the guidance and the intention to circulate it to all members of the council be noted.

6. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

7. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved: That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following four items, because it was likely that there would be a disclosure in each case of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

8. MONITORING OFFICER'S REPORT ON COMPLAINT REFERENCE SBO14/13

(Councillors Beech and Cornes declared personal interests in this item as members of Audley Parish Council, and took no part in its consideration.)

A report was submitted on the above complaint.

Resolved: That no further action be taken in relation to the complaint.

9. MONITORING OFFICER'S REPORT ON COMPLAINT REFERENCE SBO15/13

A report was submitted on the above complaint.

Resolved:

- (1) That no further action be taken in relation to the complaint; and
- (2) That a reminder be issued to all members of the council in relation to the content and importance of the council's policies on the use of social networking and media.

10. MONITORING OFFICER'S REPORT ON COMPLAINT REFERENCE SBO17/13

A report was submitted on the above complaint.

Resolved: That no further action be taken in relation to the complaint.

11. APPOINTMENT OF RESERVE INDEPENDENT PERSON(S)

(Councillor Olszewski declared a personal interest in this item 11 as one of the applicants was a former colleague, and took no part in its consideration.)

Further to minute number 4 of the meeting of 1 October 2012, a report was submitted along with two applications for the position of Reserve Independent Person.

Resolved: That the two applicants be invited to attend the next meeting of the committee.

COUNCILLOR MRS SANDRA HAMBLETON
Chair

The meeting concluded at 7.30 pm.