

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

23 June 2014

Attendance:

Councillor Read (Chairman) (P)

Councillors:

Chamberlain (P)
Clear (P)
Didben (P)

Johnston (P)
Nelmes
Phillips (P)

Parish Representatives (non voting co-optees) in attendance:

Ms J Bond
Mr J Watson

Independent Persons (non voting advisors) in attendance:

Mr B Bailey
Ms R Blundell

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nelmes, Mr A Walmsley (Parish Representative) and Mr J Pearson (Independent Person).

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 10 February 2014 be approved and adopted.

3. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Chamberlain be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Committee for the 2014/15 Municipal Year.

4. **WHITELEY TOWN (PARISH) COUNCIL - COMPLAINTS**

(Report ST107 refers)

The Chief Operating Officer referred to the detail in the above report and confirmed that the Town Council had been forwarded a copy. A response had been received on 20 June 2014 (attached as Appendix A to the minutes).

Members considered this response, noted the options available, and that this would be the last occasion that the Committee would consider these complaints.

The Committee unanimously agreed to make public comment regretting the lack of appropriate action by the Town Council to take proper account of the previous advice given by the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED:

That Whiteley Town Council be informed:

1. The decision of the Standards (Assessments) Sub-Committee on 5 March 2013 to offer advice to the Parish Council, rather than to undertake a detailed investigation of the complaint against Councillor Achwal, reflected the position that it was already clear from an examination of relevant documents that the major elements of the information alleged to have been confidential and inappropriately released were already in the public domain and, therefore, not confidential, and her actions needed to be considered in that context.

2. It was noted that Councillor Achwal had apologised on more than one occasion for any inappropriate release of information, including to the developer, but that the apology and a general clarification of her actions could have been made earlier.

3. The Sub-Committee had also noted a complaint had been made against the Chairman but had also decided not to investigate that complaint. This was because both complaints demonstrated that there were some difficult relationships within the Parish Council and that it would not assist, nor be in the public interest, to incur the expense and delay of a full investigation and that offering advice was the most appropriate way forward.

4. The Sub-Committee had offered advice to the Parish Council following its meeting of 5 March 2014. This was followed by further advice from the Standards Committee at its meeting on 24 October 2013, as at that point the Parish Council had only re-stated its position and offered no suggestions regarding a positive way forward.

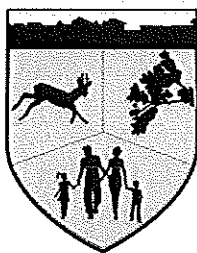
5. This further advice from the Standards Committee was only met with a response from Whiteley Town Council on 20 June 2014, which the Standards Committee found to be unsatisfactory.

6. As a consequence the Standards Committee now expresses great regret at the lack of action by Whiteley Town Council in attempting to resolve the current situation, in particular:-

- (a) that the Town Council had failed to take the Standard's Committee's request of 7 November 2013 to a formal meeting where its Members could discuss the situation.
- (b) that the Town Council had failed to seriously consider the option of external mediation.
- (c) that the continued non-appointment of Councillor Achwal to formal membership of any of the Town Council Committees seemed unreasonable.
- (c) that, in general, the Standards Committee regretted that the Town Council, a body which had achieved Quality Parish status, had ignored the recommendations of the Standards Committee.
- (d) that as the Town Council did not appear to be able to resolve the matter itself, then it should seek help via professional, external mediation.
- (e) that the Town Council be urged to move on from this unfortunate experience so that all Members could work in a more positive fashion together for the benefit of the community.

The meeting commenced at 6.15pm and concluded at 7.15pm.

Chairman



Whiteley Town Council

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20th June 2014

Dear Mr Whetnall

Standards Issue

Thank you for your letter dated 7th November 2013.

Whiteley Parish Council, now Whiteley Town Council (WTC) asked the Standards Board to consider a case, the outcome of which was that a majority of Councillors had lost confidence in Cllr Achwal.

However a counter claim by the individual against WTC Chair and Clerk – which is strongly refuted by WTC - appears to have been used by the Standards Committee not to investigate the matter and to blame WTC for the problems which WTC finds unacceptable.

WTC has maintained a very good working relationship with Winchester City Council over the years and hopes this will continue. However WTC considers the way WCC has handled this issue to be regrettable.

With reference to the Standards Committee's decision at its meeting held on 24th October 2013:

Item 1. WTC has reconsidered its position on a number of occasions outside of formal meetings and maintains the stance outlined in its letter signed by the Vice-Chairman and Councillors dated 5th July 2013, particularly in refuting the allegations made against the Council Chairman and Clerk by Cllr Achwal.

Please be assured that Cllr Achwal is not prevented from attending any WTC meetings, Council and committee meetings are open to the public.

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On a point of procedure, committee memberships are determined by WTC through the due democratic process and Cllr Achwal has been unsuccessful in securing a place on committees for 2014/15.

Item 2. The suggestion that the Standards Committee's decision be discussed in public was considered to be of no benefit to either party and WTC has sought to protect the position of Cllr Achwal as a district councillor in this respect by keeping the issue out of the public domain. However holding a public meeting could be reconsidered.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N Oliver', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nicki Oliver
Clerk to Whiteley Town Council