
Meeting	Joint Standards Committee
Date	9 November 2016
Present	Councillors Runciman (Chair), Cannon and Hayes – CYC Members Councillor Perrett (Vice-Chair) – Parish Councillor
In attendance	Ms Davies – Independent Person
Apologies	Councillors Kramm and Mercer Mr Laverick – Independent Person

11. Declarations of Interest

Members were asked to declare any personal interests not included on the Register of Interests, any prejudicial interests or any disclosable pecuniary interests which they may have in respect of business on the agenda. None were declared.

12. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Standards Committee held on 3 August 2016 be approved as a correct record and then signed by the Chair.

13. Minutes of Sub-Committees

Resolved: That the minutes of the Hearings Sub-Committee meeting of 11 October 2016 be approved as a correct record and then signed by the Chair.

14. Public Participation

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

15. Monitoring Report on Complaints Received

Members considered a report that provided an update on current complaints. The Monitoring Officer gave details of the two new complaints that had been received and of the outcome

of the four cases that had not been concluded when the committee last met.

The Monitoring Officer was asked about the costs of investigating complaints that were lodged. He explained that, although there had been occasions when the services of an external investigator had been used, in general the complaints were investigated by officers of City of York Council or by a volunteer.

Members commented on the limited sanctions that were available to the committee when a complaint was upheld.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

Reason: To ensure that the committee is aware of current levels of activity.

16. Yorkshire Local Councils Associations

Ms Sheena Spence, Chief Officer Yorkshire Local Councils Associations, had been invited to attend the meeting to provide details of the Association's work in supporting parish councils to maintain good governance, and the training it offered to parish councillors.

The Chair stated that the committee very much valued the voice of parish councils and was delighted to welcome Ms Spence to the meeting.

Ms Spence tabled a paper detailing the benefits of membership of the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations *[a copy of this paper is attached to the online agenda papers for this meeting]*. Ms Spence stated that the way in which City of York Council had sought to involve parish councils in its arrangements for dealing with standards issues was very commendable.

Ms Spence gave details of the work carried out by YLCA, as outlined in the paper that had been tabled. The support included procedural, technical and legal advice, and training for parish councillors and clerks. They also issued regular newsletters and had a website which provided useful information and legal guidance notes.

Referring to the concerns that Members had expressed regarding the limited sanctions that were available to them when complaints were upheld, Ms Spence stated that an element of the YLCA membership fee affiliated councils to the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and that, among the issues on which NALC were lobbying the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), was the issue of sanctions.

Ms Spence drew Members' attention to the funding that had been made available by DCLG to support parish councils in meeting the requirements of the Smaller Authorities Transparency Code where authorities had a turnover of less than £25,000. Members commented that a number of parish councils did not appear to have their Code of Conduct available on the parish council's website. It was suggested that, where this was the case, parish councils could be made aware of the DCLG funding that was available if applicable.

Members questioned Ms Spence regarding the training that was on offer. She explained that the training was not mandatory but newly appointed parish councillors were generally receptive to the benefits of receiving training in carrying out their role. There was a fee for the training provided.

Ms Spence drew Members' attention to the importance of the role of Clerk to the Parish Council and explained that there were a number of vacancies for this position and a high turnover of clerks. YLCA offered a Certificate in Local Council Administration, which was a level 4 qualification for clerks. Currently there were around three clerks in the York area that had attained this accreditation.

Members noted that the Yorkshire Local Councils Association made the arrangements for the appointment of parish council representatives to the Joint Standards Committee. Nominations were currently being sought to replace Mr Mark Waudby, following his resignation as a parish councillor.

Ms Spence was thanked for her attendance at the meeting and for her very informative contribution.

Resolved: That the information on the work of the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations be noted.

Reason: To ensure that the committee is aware of the support the Association provides to parish councils to maintain good governance.

17. **Planning Panels**

Members considered a report which provided information about the planning panels who acted as consultees to the planning applications in the non-parished central part of the Council's area. Members' attention was drawn to the report annex which detailed the current guidance that was available to planning panels.

It was noted that the planning panels had no legal status and did not operate by a formal Code of Conduct. Officers stated that they did, however, have a useful role to play in ensuring that, in areas where there was no parish council, there was a voice for local residents. Their comments, along with those of other groups and individual residents, were taken into account when decisions were made.

Members were asked to consider the ethical standards issues which may arise in the context of planning panels and offer such guidance as they considered appropriate.

Members acknowledged that planning panels did play a useful role in the non-parished areas of the city and expressed their appreciation of the work carried out by these volunteers. Members did, however, raise the following concerns:

- The membership of the planning panels was not always clear.
- Agendas and minutes of planning panels were not published.
- The panel meetings were not always open to the public and hence there may be a perception of secrecy. Members noted that the meetings were not always held in public buildings and hence there may be logistical reasons why it would be problematic for the meetings to be open to the community.
- There was the possibility of people volunteering to serve on a planning panel because they had a vested interest, e.g. a builder or developer, although it was acknowledged that they brought relevant skills and expertise.

Members commented that similar issues may also arise as Neighbourhood Plans were being developed.

Members asked about the training that was available to members and clerks of planning panels. They were informed that, at the request of City of York Council, YLCA had agreed to arrange training on planning issues for planning panel members as well as parish councillors. The training was likely to take place in February/March 2017 and further consideration would be given to the funding arrangements. Officers commented that it may be useful to include City of York Council planning officers in the training to provide a local dimension.

Members commented on the importance of ensuring that residents were reassured about the planning processes and suggested that consideration be given to the following:

- Making the work of the planning panels more transparent e.g. ensuring that its membership was known and making public the agendas and minutes of meetings.
- Developing the role of ward committees in ensuring that planning panels were functioning effectively – this could involve the planning panel presenting an annual report to the ward committee.
- Strongly encouraging planning panel members and clerks to take part in the training opportunities that were to be made available.
- Putting in place a simplified version of the Code of Conduct in respect of planning panel members.

Members suggested that it would be useful to seek information from officers who supported the planning panels on the way in which the panels currently operated, and their views on the recommendations that had been put forward.

- Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.
- (ii) That, at the next meeting, an update report be presented outlining the feedback that had been received from officers supporting the planning panels.

Reason: To support planning panel members in maintaining high ethical standards when advising the City Council.

18. **Review of Work Plan**

Members were asked to give consideration to the committee's work plan for 2016-17.

Resolved: That the work plan be approved subject to the following addition:

- Update on Planning Panels (1 February 2017)

Reason: To ensure that the committee has a planned programme of work in place.

Councillor Runciman - Chair

The meeting started at 4.00 pm and finished at 5.10 pm.