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SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL

Meeting of Standards Committee

Date: Wednesday, 11th November, 2020

Place: Virtual Meeting - MS Teams

Present: Councillor I Shead (Chair)
Councillors I Shead, B Ayling, D Burzotta, D Cowan, A Dear,
M Flewitt, D Garne, B Hooper, C Nevin, J Healey and J Morgan
(Independent member)

In Attendance: R Harris, S Brown and J Williams
Also in attendance C. Tredget (LGA)

Start/End Time: 6.00 - 6.50 pm

543 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cowell (LTC) and J.Tetley (independent member).

544 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest at this meeting.

545 Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 28th July 2020

Resolved:-

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 28th July 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

546 Refresh of Protocol on Councillor / Officer Relations

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive presenting progress to date on the refresh of the Protocol on Councillor/Officer Relations work, following the Standards Committee meeting held on 28th July 2020, and presented a new Protocol and related Action Plan to support implementation for consideration.

The Committee welcomed the views from Cecilia Tredget (LGA) who provided the following comments:

- Pleased to see the inclusion of the Action Plan in the Council's Transforming Together programme which was an extremely positive step and is good practice;
- Pleased to see that this Committee had a champion role to take the Protocol forward;
- Pleased to see that some key issues raised by Councillors have been incorporated into the Protocol and Action Plan, such as the audit of Councillors skills and experience.

The Committee had a detailed discussion and in general were very supportive of the new Protocol and Action Plan. Although there were concerns about the time it sometimes took for Councillors to receive a response to a query, the Committee was pleased to note that the new system for dealing with Councillor queries via the Members Support Hub (as set out in the Protocol) was leading to a substantial improvement.

During the debate, the Committee:-

- Agreed the two minor changes to Section 9.1 of the Protocol, as proposed by Sarah Brown and set out in resolution 1, below;
- Agreed that the action referred to in Section 6.3 of the report should be adjusted, as set out in resolution 2 below;
- Noted that paragraphs 5.7 and 9.3.3 of the Protocol are clear about the provision of information to Councillors.

The Committee also extended their thanks and appreciation to Sarah Brown and Cecilia Tredget for their input and work.

Resolved:

1. That the new Protocol on Councillor/Officer Relations set out at Appendix 1 and the associated Action Plan to support implementation at Appendix 2 to the submitted report be referred to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 26th November 2020, prior to consideration of the new Protocol at Council on 10th December 2020, with the following amendment to Section 9.1 of the Protocol:

- To change the wording 'enquiries' to 'queries' and add the contact email address for the relevant team.

2. That the approach described in section 6 of the submitted report, be adopted and the Committee uses its role to champion the actions and key messages in order to promote this work, subject to an adjustment of the action proposed in the final bullet point of section 6.3 of the report so that it reads:

'Political groups and Leaders to explore ways to support Officers and Councillors in resolving low level inappropriate and unprofessional behaviour, before it escalates to a formal complaint.'

Chair: _____