

Standards Committee

30th June 2010

MINUTES

Present:

Independent Members:

Deborah Andrews (Chair)
Michael Collins (Vice-Chair)
Brian Warwick

Redditch Borough Councillors:

Andrew Fry
Malcolm Hall
Derek Taylor
Brenda Quinney

Feckenham Parish Councillor:

Antonia Pulsford

Also Present:

D Parker-Jones (Ethical Standards Officer, Bromsgrove District Council)

Officer:

C Felton

Committee Officer:

I Westmore

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Borough Councillor William Norton and Parish Councillor Louisa Venables.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

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Chair

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 8th December 2010 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. MONITORING OFFICER'S REPORT

The Monitoring Officer presented a report on matters of relevance to the Committee for the consideration of the Members.

The training of Members was discussed. It was confirmed that new Members had, as far as was possible, received induction training soon after election in issues including the Members' Code of Conduct. It was anticipated that the Standards Committee and Monitoring Officer would have an opportunity to address the perceived training needs of Members in respect of standards and the Code of Conduct through the Member Development Steering Group.

The Committee took the view that training in the broadest sense should be play a key role in the life of all Members and should be an ongoing process throughout their time on the Council. Officers proposed that Members should be offered a rounded package which provides a choice of content and learning styles.

In respect of training directed at Standards Committee members, it was agreed that this was best delivered in bite-sized chunks, particularly in the light of the prospective changes coming through at the present time regarding the future of Standards for England (SfE) regime.

It was noted that Members might benefit from further training in their proper role in the adoption of the Statement of Accounts. Officers agreed to refer this suggestion to the Director of Finance and Resources.

The Monitoring Officer provided an update on the investigation into an ongoing complaint against a Member (reference 01/2010). It was noted that the final report was nearing completion. Officers undertook to keep Members abreast of the developments in ongoing investigations as the process largely took place behind the scenes and the impression could be formed that matters were not progressing. Members commented that an enhanced minimum provision of IT equipment would assist in realising this aspiration. It

was stated that this would be on the agenda for the next meeting of the Modernising Democracy Steering Group.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the first report of the Monitoring Officer be noted;**
- 2) **a Monitoring Officer's report be submitted to each subsequent meeting of the Committee; and**
- 3) **the approach to Standards Committee Members' training, as outlined above, be agreed;**

5. MEMBERS' PLANNING CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Committee received the Members' Planning Code of Good Practice on a second occasion following deliberation of the document by the Planning Committee.

The changes that had been proposed were welcomed, although one further amendment was proposed in respect of speaking rights of Ward / Local Members.

RECOMMENDED that

the draft Members' Planning Code of Good Conduct, as amended (attached), be adopted, subject to the following further amendment:

Paragraph 3, Bullet Point 3 – if Ward Members wish to exercise their speaking rights as Ward Councillors on any item they should remove themselves from the decision-making process for the duration of that item.

6. CHAIR'S / MEMBERS' REPORTS

Members provided a brief resume of the Council's meetings at which they had acted as observers on behalf of the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

7. PARISH COUNCIL REPORT (IF ANY)

The Parish Council representative informed the Committee that the Parish Council was at present carrying two vacancies.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

8. PUBLICATIONS

There were no recent publications to which the Monitoring Officer wished to draw Members' attention.

9. WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Committee Work Programme for future meetings. It was noted at the outset that a number of the matters included may be held over pending any changes made nationally to the Standards regime during the autumn of 2010.

The inclusion of Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for Councillors was discussed, with some uncertainty being apparent as to the nature of the Committee's interest in this matter. Officers undertook to obtain information on the prevalence of mandatory CRB checks undertaken by other Council's within the region.

Given that there were now two ongoing complaints, it was proposed that guidance from the Ethical Standards Officer of Bromsgrove District Council would be a useful addition to Members' training. It was agreed that this might be provided prior to pre-hearing and hearing, if required, for complaint reference 01/2010.

RESOLVED that

the work programme for the Committee be noted, subject to the comments, above.

The Meeting commenced at 7.02 pm
and closed at 8.20 pm

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Chair