

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held on Thursday, 17 June, 2010 at 6.00 p.m. at Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors D.G. Allen, R. Aveley, D.R. Chaplin, N.A. Dugmore, R.E. Groom, H. Rhodes, K.S. Sahota and R.M. Tyler
F. Beasland and A. Selvaratnam (Independent Members)
Councillors D. Edwards and R. Williams (Parish Council representatives)

ST-1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR 2010/11

In accordance with the statutory requirements, the Chairman had to be an Independent Member of the Committee. The previous Chairman, Mr A. Simpson, had reached the end of his term as an Independent Member, and was no longer a member of the Committee. It was moved, seconded and

RESOLVED - that Mr A Selvaratnam be elected Chairman of the Standards Committee for the 2010/11 Municipal Year.

ST-2 MINUTES

In relation to Minute ST-29(b), the Monitoring Officer sought guidance from Members as to whether the process to recruit a new Independent member of the Committee should be put on hold until it became clearer as to the intentions of the new Government in revising the national standards framework. Members indicated that officers should continue with the recruitment process as originally planned.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 25 March 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

ST-3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mr B. Bayley (Independent Member) and Councillor R. Wickson Parish Council representative)

ST-4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

ST-5 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer presented a draft version of the annual report for 2009/10 for approval.

Because there had not been a Chairman in post from 20 May until this meeting, he had not been able to consult on the content of the Chairman's

Introduction to the Report. Members' views were sought, particularly on whether more reference needed to be made to the challenges ahead regarding the national standards regime. In terms of the work programme shown at Appendix 2 of the report, item 3 – Attendance at Standards Boards Assembly – would be removed, because the event had recently been cancelled.

Given that the main purpose of the report was to reflect activity and work that had taken place over the last year, Members did not feel it necessary to add further references in the report to possible future changes in the national standards framework.

RESOLVED – that, subject to the minor amendment to Appendix 2, the draft version of the Annual Report of the Standards Committee be approved.

ST-6 REVIEW OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE PROCEDURES

The Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer presented a report setting out proposed amendments to a number of procedures in relation to the processing and investigation of complaints.

The procedures had been reviewed in the light of the experiences that had been gained since May 2008 in operating the local system for the assessment of complaints. The proposed amendments were highlighted in appendices to the report. In relation to the Monitoring Officer Protocol, some minor changes in wording were suggested in order to provide greater clarity. The Assessment and Review Criteria included a new process to ensure that members who were subject to a complaint that was withdrawn were informed about the withdrawal as soon as possible. In relation to the Local Investigation Procedure, it was proposed to delete the paragraph specifying a 21 day period for a response regarding an allegation from the member who was subject to the complaint, as this could slow down the investigation process, particularly in smaller cases.

In terms of the Local Hearings Procedure, there were some proposed changes to paragraph 3 in order to clarify the process for considering the final report of the Investigator. In considering the revised Procedure, Members suggested that the proposal at paragraph 1 to give the Monitoring Officer delegated authority to amend the procedure be subject to consultation with the Chairman of the Committee.

RESOLVED –

- (a) that the amendments to the Monitoring Officer Protocol, Assessment and Review Criteria and Local Investigation Procedure be approved;**
- (b) that the amendments to the Local Hearings Procedure be approved, subject to the further amendment to paragraph 1;**

- (c) that the Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman, be given delegated authority to amend the procedures when he considers it necessary to do so.

ST-7 ANNUAL REVIEW OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer presented a report, to which was appended the current terms of reference for the Committee.

There was a provision that the Committee should annually review its terms of reference, and Members were asked whether any amendments or changes were required.

RESOLVED – that the current Terms of Reference, as shown at Appendix 1 of the report, be confirmed without change.

ST-8 CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS MADE TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE – QUARTERLY UPDATE 1 JANUARY – 31 MARCH 2010

The Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer presented a report which detailed the complaints about elected Members which had proceeded to the referrals sub-committee during the period 1 January to 31 March 2010.

During that period, two complaints were received and proceeded to local assessment. Both complaints related to Parish/Town Councillors. One complaint was made by a member of the public and the other by a local town councillor. The Referrals Sub-Committee referred one complaint for local investigation, and decided no further action should be taken in respect of the other complaint. One final hearing scheduled to take place during this period was adjourned after problems were raised relating to witness availability. A quarterly return had been sent to Standards for England.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 6.25 pm

Chairman:

Date: