

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held on Thursday, 10 March, 2010 at 6.00 p.m. at Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors D.G. Allen, R. Aveley, D.R. Chaplin, N.A. Dugmore, H. Rhodes and K.S. Sahota
Mr F. Beasland and Mr A. Selvaratnam (Chairman) (Independent Members)
Councillors D. Edwards, P. Fairclough, R. Wickson and R. Williams (Parish Council representatives)

ST-13 MINUTES

In relation to Minute ST-12(b), the Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer reported that there had not yet been a need to approach the Independent members of the Combined Fire Authority's Standards Committee for any assistance in considering Code of Conduct complaints.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 16 September 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

ST-14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor R.E. Groom

ST-15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor K.S. Sahota declared a personal and prejudicial interest in relation to Agenda item 5 – Update on a Decision of the Referrals Sub-Committee.

ST-16 STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORK PLAN UPDATE

The Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer presented a report which updated Members on the work of the Committee during the municipal year.

Since the Work Plan was agreed by Members at the start of the municipal year, the Government had announced plans to abolish the Standards for England regime, with the Localism Bill containing proposals to make significant changes to the ethical framework. This had had an impact on the Work Plan – for example, the Standards Assembly in October 2010 (which the Chairman was going to attend) was cancelled by Standards for England, and some training and updates to protocols/guidance had been delayed. The work programme, including commentary on the progress of each item, was appended to the report.

Members noted the uncertainty as a result of the Government's intention to bring in a new ethical framework, and it was suggested that at the next meeting of the Committee (which would be in the 2011/12 Municipal year), a

report could be provided setting out the details of the emerging legislation and what options would be available to the Council in terms of a Code of Conduct for Members or similar.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

Councillor Sahota withdrew from the meeting room for the following item.

ST-17 **UPDATE ON A DECISION OF THE REFERRALS SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer presented a report which outlined the action undertaken at the direction of the Referrals Sub-Committee following a complaint alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct by Councillor Adrian Williams.

On 4 August 2010, the Referrals Sub-Committee considered a complaint made by two members of the public alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct by Councillor Williams. The Sub-Committee did not make any finding of fact, but decided to direct the Monitoring Officer to provide Code of Conduct training to Councillor Williams. This was on the basis that it appeared a breach of the Code may have taken place, but the conduct complained of was not so serious as to require substantial formal action. A copy of the public summary of the decision was attached to the report.

Following this direction, the Monitoring Officer wrote to Councillor Williams and there then followed an exchange of correspondence, which included an outline of the Code of Conduct in relation to bullying and using your position as a member improperly to confer or secure an advantage or disadvantage. Whilst Councillor Williams did not agree to attend Civic Offices to undertake training in person, the Monitoring Officer reported that he was satisfied that the areas of the Code that the Sub-Committee had asked to be covered in the training had been addressed during the exchange of correspondence with Councillor Williams. However, the Committee were required to consider whether or not they were satisfied with the outcome achieved.

During the ensuing debate, some concerns were expressed that an elected member had not apparently fully complied with the Sub-Committee's direction. The Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer advised that the decision made by the Sub-Committee for further training was not a sanction against Councillor Williams, although a refusal to co-operate was potentially a breach of the Code. However, in this instance, it was felt that there had been some co-operation and engagement.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED (2 against) – that the Committee are satisfied with the outcome of the action undertaken by the Monitoring Officer following the decision of the Referrals Sub-Committee on 4 August 2010.

The meeting ended at 6.30 pm

Chairman:

Date: