

Standards Committee – 12 March 2008

Minutes of the meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **12 March 2008** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr D Merrick
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Mrs SA Harper

Cllr J Thomass

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

Mr D J Cottis
Mr S Shadbolt

PARISH MEMBERS

Cllr M J Steptoe, Barling Magna Parish Council
Cllr R E Vingoe, Hockley Parish Council

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs C I Black, P A Capon and Mr B M Flynn.

OFFICERS PRESENT

R J Honey - Corporate Director (Internal Services)
S Fowler - Head of Information and Customer Services
M Power - Committee Administrator
D Britnell - PA to Corporate Director (Internal Services)

101 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

102 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr M J Steptoe declared a prejudicial interest in respect of item 6 due to his being a Member of Barling Magna Parish Council and left the Committee room during discussion of this item. Mr D J Cottis declared a personal interest in respect of item 6 due to his friendship with many of the Barling Magna Parish Councillors.

103 REQUEST FOR DISPENSATION – BARLING MAGNA PARISH COUNCIL

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Internal Services) with regard to a request from Barling Magna Council for a dispensation to allow a decision to be taken on an extension to Barling village hall in circumstances where the Members of Barling Magna Parish Council have all declared a prejudicial interest.

Discussions ensued regarding what would be a suitable time limit to impose on the Parish Council in respect of the dispensation and it was agreed that two years would allow sufficient time for all planning matters in this respect to be completed.

Resolved

That a dispensation be granted for a period of two years to Barling Magna Parish Council to allow decisions to be taken by its Members on all matters concerning the current proposals for provision of an extension to Barling Village Hall. (CD(IS))

104 INDEPENDENT MEMBERS' FORUM MINUTES 1 NOVEMBER 2007

The Committee received the Minutes of the Independent Members' Forum held on 1 November 2007. It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum would be on 25 March 2008 in Basildon.

Resolved

That the Minutes of the Independent Members' Forum held on 1 November 2007 be received. (CD(IS))

105 MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2009/09

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Information and Customer Services on the proposals for the Member Training and Development Programme for 2008/09.

It was noted that the recommendation from the Review Committee at its meeting on 12 February 2008 had been incorporated into the report at paragraph 6.1.

The Head of Information and Customer Services advised that, since the report had been printed, two additional completed Member self-assessment questionnaires had been received, making a total of 29 received out of the 37 circulated. Although this was considered an acceptable rate of return, it was requested that the names of Members who had not responded be passed to Group Leaders.

Specific points relating to Member training were discussed and the following was noted:-

- In response to a request that the District Council provides courses specifically for Parish Councils, the Corporate Director (Internal Services) advised that the National Association of Local Councils provided training and development courses for Parish Councils. However, the District Council was willing to offer places to Parish Councils on any appropriate courses run for District Council Members.

- In respect of the requirement that Members attend two planning training sessions totalling four hours in each municipal year, it was requested that, as in previous years, a letter is written to all Members who had not attended the required amount of planning training.
- In respect of the operation of the Area Committees it was thought that the proposed Chairmanship of Public Meetings training should include an element of how to deal with difficult questions from members of the public. One of the Independent Members advised that, as he had attended a sample of all three Area Committees, he would be willing, if it was considered appropriate, to offer his views on the Area Committees to the Review Committee, which was conducting a review in this area.
- A request was made that Independent Members of the Standards Committee be invited to attend the annual Tour of the District, organised by the Head of Planning and Transportation.
- In respect of the specific programme of training detailed in the report for Review Committee Members, it was requested that, where appropriate, the first three courses be offered additionally to other District Council Members.

Resolved

- (1) That the summary of Members' attendance at training sessions during the municipal year 2007/08 as set out in paragraphs 2.1 to 2.5 of the report be noted. (HICS)
- (2) That the proposals for the Member Training & Development Programme for 2008/09 as set out in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.20 of the report be agreed. (HICS)
- (3) That a letter be written to all Members, and copied to Group Leaders, who had not attended the required amount of planning training in the 2007/08 municipal year. (HICS)
- (4) That the names of Members who had not completed Member self-assessment questionnaires be given to Group Leaders. (HICS)
- (5) That Independent Members of the Standards Committee be invited to attend the annual Tour of the District, organised by the Head of Planning and Transportation. (HPT)

106 LOCAL ASSESSMENT – STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND TRAINING EXERCISE

The Committee received a verbal update from the Corporate Director (Internal Services) relating to the Standards Board for England's Local Assessment training exercise for Members of the Standards Committee (sent under separate cover) and reviewed the first case as a familiarisation exercise.

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It was anticipated that the full training exercise, taken from the Standards Board website, would be completed in a dedicated training session by Standards Committee Members following the elections in May 2008.

Although the Standards Board had recommended implementation of the new procedures on 1 April 2008, no response had yet been received arising from the consultation exercise and it was anticipated that the regulations would be effective from 1 May 2008.

Discussion took place on the requirement that from 1 April 2008 Standards Committees have an independent Chairman. As not all of the Independent Members were present at the meeting, it was noted that on 31 March the present Chairman would stand down and that an independent Chairman would be appointed at the next meeting of the Standards Committee. It was agreed that the meeting scheduled for 1 April would be cancelled. The Independent Members of the Standards Committee would meet with the Corporate Director (Internal Services) to discuss the new regulations. In response to a question, it was stated although there was a requirement that the Standards Committee has an Independent Chairman, that person did not have to be present at a meeting to make it quorate.

Following discussion on the likely operation of the new system and the need for a minimum of three separate sub-committees, it was proposed that membership of the Standards Committee be increased by one additional Independent Member and one additional Parish Member from the beginning of the new municipal year.

Recommended to Council

That membership of the Standards Committee be increased by one Independent and one Parish Council Member from the beginning of the new municipal year.

As it would be Cllr Mrs S A Harper's last meeting as a Rochford District Councillor, the Chairman thanked her for all the years she had given to the Council and for her work as Vice-Chairman of the Standards Committee.

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm.

Chairman

Date

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