

Standards Committee – 8 June 2010

Minutes of the meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **8 June 2010** when there were present:-

DISTRICT MEMBERS

Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr C I Black
Cllr P A Capon
Cllr D Merrick
Cllr Mrs C A Weston

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

Mr D J Cottis (Chairman)
Mr M G Drage
Mr S Shadbolt
Mrs L Walker

PARISH MEMBERS

Cllr P Beckers
Cllr Mrs D Constable

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Mrs L A Vingoe.

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren - Chief Executive
A Bugeja - Head of Legal, Estates and Member Services
M Power - Committee Administrator

145 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR ENSUING YEAR

Mr D J Cottis was appointed Chairman of the Standards Committee for the ensuing year.

146 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 April 2010 were approved as a correct and signed by the Chairman.

With regard to Minute 95 (Request for Dispensation – Barling Magna Parish Council) it was noted that the Council's Monitoring Officer would contact the Parish Council to discuss ways of resolving the situation so that the matter does not have to continue to be brought before the Committee.

147 COMPOSITION OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE SUB-COMMITTEES – DISTRICT COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

Resolved

That membership of the Standards Committee Assessment Sub-Committees, which have been formed to assess, review and hear complaints on a rota basis, remain the same as last year, with the exception of the replacement of Cllr M J Steptoe with Cllr Mrs C A Weston in Group A. (HLEMS)

148 DETERMINE MEMBERS TO ATTEND THE 2010 ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

In light of the Government's announcement that it was proposing to 'abolish the Standards Board regime', the Committee did not consider it would be useful to send delegates to the Assembly this year.

Resolved

That the provisional booking of two places at the 2010 Annual Assembly of Standards Committees be cancelled and that no representatives from Rochford District Council attend the Assembly in 2010. (HLEMS)

149 LOCAL INVESTIGATION AND DETERMINATION

Resolved

That the record of the Sub-Committee meeting convened to consider RDC7 be noted. (HLEMS)

150 PROMOTING HIGHER STANDARDS – STANDARDS COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN 2009-11

The Council's Chief Executive addressed the Committee on his views relating to standards, the role of the Standards Committee and how the profile and work of the Standards Committee can be raised.

The following was discussed:-

- Although the proposed Decentralisation and Localism bill includes proposals to abolish the Standards Board regime, the current statutory framework will remain in place until there is a change in legislation. Furthermore, whatever is decided, there will remain a need for a form of Standards function to operate at a local level.
- The Standards Committee should therefore continue to focus on its role in promoting the ethical Code of Conduct and overseeing cases at local level and overseeing the Members' training and development programme. There is an issue around promoting awareness and understanding of the Code of Conduct particularly at the Parish/Town Council level and a key focus for the Standards Committee could be around information exchange to the Parish/Town Councils .

- The Standards Committee could play a useful role in promoting ethics and standards in schools as part of the teaching of Citizenship. This could be achieved by Members going into schools to explain what the local Council does and the role and responsibilities of a District or Parish/Town Councillor, which would help to raise awareness of how the democratic process works and explain the different tiers of local Government. Discussion can also include information on the Councillor Code of Conduct and the rules relating to how a Councillor should behave. Voting is embedded in the secondary school system as many schools hold their own elections for membership of the School Council. Concern was expressed that raising the subject of ethics in schools in the context of local government would place a negative bias on the role of a Councillor.
- It was recognised that an effective way of engaging with the youth in the District would be via the Youth Council. The Council was now using social networking sites including Twitter and Facebook, as well as piloting SMS text messaging, to engage with the youth of the District.
- Standards Committee Members could produce ‘good-news’ stories for the local press and Rochford District Matters about standards and ethics locally that portray the values held by local government.
- A course around skills for speaking in the community about the role of Members and the democratic process could be included in a future Member Learning and Development training programme.

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining item of business on the grounds that exempt information as disclosed in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

151 DISPENSATION FROM MANDATORY PLANNING TRAINING

The Committee received the report of the Head of Legal, Estates and Member Services on dispensation granted in respect of mandatory planning training requirements.

During discussion, the following was observed:-

- It was considered that the initial session of mandatory planning-related training, held each year prior to the first Development Committee meeting, should be of a fixed format, covering planning policy and planning legislation. It was suggested that, if possible, this training session should be run by Council officers. This would be of benefit to both newly-elected Members and also to experienced Members as a ‘refresher’ as the law changes.

- Attendance at a planning Inquiry, such as the Core Strategy hearing that was held in May this year, could be viewed as satisfying part of the mandatory training requirements. Planning hearings provided Members with an opportunity to see the operation of planning law in practice and, as such, would provide a valuable learning opportunity.

There was some discussion around whether there should be monitoring to ensure that attendees of mandatory planning training sessions are present for the specified two-hour period.

It was noted that, as it stands, failure to complete the initial mandatory planning-related training session held in May would result in removal from membership of the Development Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year (the Member affected would be able to attend meetings as a visiting Member and speak, but not vote).

Arrangements would be made with the Council's Head of Planning and Transportation for tailored planning-related training for those Members granted dispensation from the scheduled planning training.

Individual Member feedback from the last mandatory planning course had been noted and would be taken into account in respect of future mandatory-training sessions.

It was suggested that, in order to look after the specific interests of non-Group Councillors, any reasonable requests for training should be actively considered by the Committee.

Mr Shadbolt wished it to be recorded that he was of the opinion that the Vice-Chairman of the Committee should be appointed by the Standards Committee and not by Council. It was noted that, although it was a requirement that the Chairman of the Standards Committee be an Independent Member, it was the Council's usual practice to appoint the Vice-Chairmen of Committees at Annual Council.

Resolved

- (1) That the dispensation granted, as detailed in the report, be noted.
- (2) That further consideration be given to the following aspects relating to mandatory training at the next meeting:-
 - The initial session of mandatory planning-related training, held each year prior to the first Development Committee meeting, being of a fixed format covering planning policy and planning legislation and, if possible, run by officers.
 - Attendance at a planning Inquiry being viewed as satisfying part of the mandatory planning training requirement.

Standards Committee – 8 June 2010

- Whether there should be monitoring to ensure that attendees at mandatory planning training sessions are present for the specified two hours, and any related penalties. (HLEMS)

The meeting closed at 8.53 pm.

Chairman

Date

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