

## **Standards Committee – 31 January 2008**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **31 January 2008** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr D Merrick

Vice-Chairman: Cllr Mrs S A Harper

Cllr P A Capon

Cllr J Thomass

### **INDEPENDENT MEMBERS**

Mr D J Cottis

Mr B M Flynn

Mr S Shadbolt

### **PARISH MEMBERS**

Cllr M J Steptoe, Barling Magna Parish Council

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr C I Black and Cllr R E Vingoe, Hockley Parish Council.

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

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)

### **35 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **36 THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH ACT 2007**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Internal Services) summarising advice published recently by the Standards Board for England concerning the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the Act) and advising Members of the implications of the legislation for the Standards Committee.

There was discussion as to whether a structure of specific Sub-Committees should be formed or whether the Standards Committee would act as a pool from which Members could be drawn to perform their roles in relation to complaints about Member conduct. Specific training for Standards Committee Members would be offered when the new regulations were finalised. In

response to concern expressed, the Committee was advised that at present there were sufficient independent Members to perform the proposed new functions, but that this number could increase in time. The details would be discussed at the next scheduled meeting of the Standards Committee on 1 April 2008.

Regarding how the public would be informed of the new arrangements for the local assessment and corporate complaints process, it was suggested that an information leaflet be produced and information included in *Rochford District Matters* and on the Council's website.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the implications of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 be considered further following the outcome of the Secretary of State's consultation exercise and introduction of statutory regulations. (CD(IS))

### **37 ORDERS AND REGULATIONS RELATING TO THE CONDUCT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY MEMBERS IN ENGLAND – CONSULTATION**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Internal Services) on a consultation paper from the Department of Communities & Local Government.

Regarding the proposal of joint working arrangements with other authorities, concern was raised that this may result in councils who received few complaints having to subsidise poorer performing Councils.

It was agreed that an increase in the maximum sanction the Standards Committee could impose should be available, as this would enable more cases to be handled locally.

### **Resolved**

That the Committee responds to the consultation as outlined in the report. (CD(IS))

### **38 ETHICAL GOVERNANCE HEALTH CHECK – ACTION PLAN**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Internal Services) with regard to the updated action plan.

Members commented that 'The Code Uncovered' DVD, produced by the Standards Board for England, which contained information on the Local Government Code of Conduct, had proved to be very useful to District and Parish Councillors.

**Resolved**

That the Committee notes the progress made and endorses the current ethical governance health check action plan with the following amendment:-

The 'Completed' column under Item 3 should be marked as (ongoing).  
(CD(IS))

**39 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR MEMBERS**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Information and Customer Services providing Members with additional information on personal development plans relating to the Member Training Programme.

Members reviewed the draft self-assessment questionnaire for Members seeking feedback on the 2007/08 training programme and any individual training/development requirements in 2008/09. The following amendments to the questionnaire were suggested:-

Question 2: An additional option of 'Poor' should be added.

Question 5: The wording be changed to 'If you were not able to attend one or more training and development courses in 2007/08 please indicate the reason(s) why'.

Question 6: The wording be changed to 'Are you content to hold all training courses equally between venues in Rayleigh and Rochford' Yes/No.

**Resolved**

That the process set out at paragraph 3.2 relating to an initial pilot in the area of tailored development for Members for 2008/09 be adopted, subject to the amendments to the draft self-assessment questionnaire, as detailed above.  
(HICS)

**40 ACCESS TO SERVICES STRATEGY**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Information and Customer Services containing the Council's Access to Services Strategy. The ethical governance health check had recommended that the Standards Committee should ensure that the Access to Services Strategy addressed the needs of minority groups.

The results of the mystery-shopping project that had been undertaken in respect of specific Council services via email, telephone and the website on a reciprocal basis with Castle Point and Southend Councils were being analysed in-house to ascertain any improvements that could be made in terms

of customer contact. The mystery shopping process would be repeated in May and June 2008. Customers with hearing impairments had been identified as a group that were particularly vulnerable and they would need particular consideration when deciding on possible improvements to customer services.

**Resolved**

That the Access to Services Strategy be noted. (HICS)

The meeting closed at 9.04 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....

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