

Standards Committee – 6 July 2006

Minutes of the meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **6 July 2006** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr P F A Webster
Vice-Chairman: Cllr J M Pullen

Cllr C I Black
Cllr Mrs S A Harper
Cllr J Thomass

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

Mr A C Comber
Mr D J Cottis
Mr B M Flynn

PARISH MEMBER

Cllr R E Vingoe, Hockley Parish Council

VISITING

Cllr C A Hungate

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr M J Steptoe, Barling Magna Parish Council

OFFICERS PRESENT

R J Honey - Corporate Director (Internal Services)
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

216 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 April 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

217 RECORD OF ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS 2005/06

On the suggestion of the Chairman, while noting the record of attendance, this item of business was deferred to a future meeting of the Committee when consideration could be given to the principle of including two columns.

It was noted that the statistics would not reflect Councillor Mrs J R Lumley's involvement with meetings associated with the large-scale voluntary transfer of housing process.

218 INDEPENDENT MEMBERS' FORUM

The Committee received the Minutes of the meeting of the Independent Members' Forum held on 30 May 2006.

It was observed that the areas of discussion covered by the Forum could be seen as of relevance to all Members of the Committee.

Responding to questions, the Corporate Director (Internal Services) advised that the Minutes were provided to keep the Committee informed of discussions within the Forum which, although not a public meeting, sought to be open and transparent. There is nothing to prevent all Members of the Standards Committee holding similar discussions to those held by the Forum at its own private meetings. The Forum can be seen as a mechanism for Independent Members to share experience outside the political arena and discuss matters that seem pertinent to their role. The Standards Board for England recommended that Council's facilitate this type of forum. Training moots can be seen as useful events in terms of the facility for all Members to consider technical aspects of the Committee's work.

During discussion, reference was made to the need for Independent Members to be seen as impartial. The Independent Member role was relatively new and the Forum could be seen as a mechanism for Independent Members to develop an appreciation of role requirements. The Forum, which was at an early exploratory stage, had not considered criteria with regard to meeting attendance, such as whether elected Members should be able to attend.

The Chairman invited the Corporate Director (Internal Services) to prepare a paper on this subject for consideration by the Committee. The Chairman also made reference to the potential value of publicising the activity of the Committee whenever possible with a view to increasing public awareness of its existence.

219 BRIDGING THE GAP – FIFTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND

The Committee considered representation at the Fifth Annual Conference of the Standards Board for England, to be held in Birmingham on 16-17 October 2006.

It was noted that the Standards Board was intending to launch a new Association for Independent Members at the Conference.

Resolved

That Councillors J Thomass and J M Pullen with Mr B M Flynn represent the Committee at the Fifth Annual Conference. (CD(IS))

220 GOING LOCAL - STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND TRAINING FILM

At this point in the meeting the Committee viewed a training film from the Standards Board for England covering the methodology associated with a hearing.

Members agreed that the film was very informative and endorsed the suggestion of the Corporate Director (Internal Services) that it be included in any future Member training sessions covering this area and made available to anyone that may wish to borrow it.

Responding to questions, the Corporate Director advised that:-

- He would confirm whether, where there is an appeal against the decision of a Hearing Panel, the requirement that a hearing outcome be published in a local paper could be held in abeyance.
- If an individual against whom a complaint is made shows remorse for their actions, it would be for a Hearing Panel in session to judge whether this had implications with regard to any sanction imposed.
- The approach taken to the methodology associated with hearings could vary from case to case.

221 DIRECTION/WORK LOAD – INFORMAL DISCUSSION

At this point in the meeting there was an opportunity for informal discussion on direction and workload.

It was noted that information on the arrangements for District Councils to operate as a filter for all complaints was still awaited. It was anticipated that this November would see the publication of a Government White Paper on Local Government that would include some detail on the ethical framework.

In terms of the Committee's scheduled meetings, the agenda for the October meeting would include review of the Member Training Programme, feedback from the Fifth Annual Conference and, probably, some detail on the new ethical framework. Consideration could be given to convening an in-house moot. Should there be a need for a hearing in the interim, hearing procedures could be reviewed at the next meeting in the light of such experience. There would also be merit in considering how the methodology associated with Comprehensive Performance Assessment relates to the Standard Committee's work.

The Council had recently appointed a Web Services Development Manager and the Committee may wish to consider the introduction of a web page promoting its work. This could also be an item for the October meeting.

With regard to publicity, the Chairman suggested that it would be of value for the Corporate Director to include articles on the Committee in the Council's newspaper, Rochford District Matters, and other local publications such as the

Rayleigh Times, Evening Echo and Yellow Advertiser. In referring to training Members recognised that, whilst it is appropriate to ensure training is available to both District and Parish Council Members, time and commitment pressures can mean that attendance levels at some training sessions are low.

Referring to the value of encouraging as many Members as possible to complete post-training questionnaires, a Member observed that it could be useful for the Committee to review the questions asked.

The meeting closed at 8.53 pm.

Chairman

Date