

Standards Committee – 19 October 2006

Minutes of the meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **19 October 2006**
when there were present:-

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

Cllr Mrs 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 MEMBERS

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

OFFICERS PRESENT

J Honey	- Corporate Director (Internal Services)
S Fowler	- Head of Administrative and Member Services
J O'Brien	- Committee Administrator

356 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

357 MEMBER TRAINING PROGRAMME – MID PROGRAMME REVIEW

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services on the mid-programme review of the 2006/07 Member Training Programme.

Members noted that the Parish Councillor attendance figures were quite low. It was recognised that whilst Members of the Parish and Town Councils are invited to particular training sessions from Rochford District Council they are offered separate additional courses outside of this programme. There are no Parish Councils in Basildon or Castle Point with whom joint Member training could be arranged.

One Member made an observation that the RADA training provided to those on the Review Committee had been very successful and positively received.

In presenting the report and responding to questions officers advised that:-

- Attention was now turning to part 3 of the 2006/07 Training Programme. Recommendations from Members on the proposed topic areas to be covered would be welcome and taken into account prior to this being introduced.
- In March 2007 a complete review will be made of the Training Programme in preparation for 2007/08. Part of this will be an end of year questionnaire distributed to all Members; this will now be extended to include Parishes. All are encouraged to participate in completing and returning the forms to provide valuable feedback and identify potential areas of improvement.
- The 2007/08 Member Training Programme will consider looking at developing skills from participative training sessions. RADA could be a potential company to provide an active, role-play approach.
- The Member Training Programme is designed for all Rochford District Councillors, and Parish Council Members are invited to courses that are deemed of appropriate interest to them. This could account for some of the attendance figures looking poor in comparison to the Rochford District Councillor statistics that cover all courses. One place is offered to each Parish Council per session, however, subject to interest and total number of enrolments for a session this could be increased. The Development Control sessions held on 24 May 2006 could be seen as an example of where training can meet a wider Parish Council audience given that there were a total of 8 in attendance.
- There have been less training sessions held at The Freight House, Rochford than at the Civic Suite, Rayleigh during the induction and part 2 stages of the 2006/07 Training Programme. This is due to previous concerns raised by Members about the heat in the rooms at The Freight House, so this venue has been avoided during the warmer weather. In part 3 of the Programme for training that will take place in February and March 2007, there will be an increase in sessions held at The Freight House which will balance the even split between venues as agreed by the Committee at the meeting held on 18 April 2006.
- The forthcoming new regime with The Freight House should have no impact on the current contract held with Rochford District Council.
- The Parish Rooms at Rochford could be considered as a potential venue for future training and this would be looked into.

- The Appeal Hearings training scheduled for 7 December 2006 is concentrating on taxis licensing as this was identified as a training need and due to the nature of the subject it will require specifics to be covered. Appeals training on Homelessness has also been offered in the past to Members.
- Full costs and information from feedback forms on the 2006/07 Member Training Programme will be provided at the next meeting of the Standards Committee once the Programme has been completed.

Resolved

That the 2006/07 Mid-Programme Review be noted. (HAMS)

358 THE ETHICAL GOVERNANCE TOOLKIT

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Internal Services) on the use of an ethical governance toolkit promoted by the Standards Board for England to assess how well the Council is meeting the ethical agenda and to improve further its arrangements.

The Committee accepted that the Authority needs to know how it can develop and improve performance levels, and that there could be merit in appointing the Information and Development Agency (IDeA) and Audit Commission to re-assure the public that Rochford District Council is meeting high standards of probity. It was deemed fortunate that there are funds available within the Capacity Building Fund to finance this, so that the cost did not have to be met from the Council's own budget.

Responding to questions, the Corporate Director (Internal Services) confirmed:-

- The ethical framework is used as a means to measure and set appropriate benchmarks.
- The four elements of The Ethical Governance Toolkit can be handled in the order that meets Rochford District Council's needs and requirements. It may prove beneficial to start with the Self Assessment Survey and then move onto the Light Touch Health Check and potentially the Developmental Workshops. The Full Audit was felt to be too resource intensive.
- The Self-assessment survey will be delivered by the Audit Commission. Whilst the assessment for the Light Touch Health Check may appear limited, there is still benefit and results to be gained from this half to full day where representatives will liaise with/monitor staff on premises and provide a summary report and action plan.

- The training provided in the developmental workshops will tailor to areas identified during the diagnostic stage. Further training could follow completion of the full audit assessment if this is undertaken at a later date.
- This is a new initiative and further to this report there is limited information currently available. Any additional details concerning the Ethical Governance Toolkit will be supplied to Members as necessary.

Resolved

That the Ethical Governance Toolkit be utilised to undertake a self-assessment and light touch health check as outlined in the report together with any suitable Developmental Workshops that arise from the assessment, and the cost be met from the Capacity Building Fund. (CD(IS))

359 FIFTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

The Committee received a briefing from the attendees at the Fifth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees.

The Chairman concurred with observations of the other attendees that overall there was room for improvement at this event. It could be suggested that it may have been beneficial for the facilitators to have been more informative and offered further guidance. It was noted, however, that there were three very interesting speakers who spoke in turn for 15 minutes apiece and were very well received by the audience, having displayed a clear knowledge and experience of their subject.

360 INDEPENDENT MEMBERS FORUM

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Internal Services) that invited Members to receive a note of the most recent South East Essex Independent Members Forum held at Basildon District Council on 3 October 2006, as well as provide the background information on the Forum.

In presenting the report the Corporate Director (Internal Services) advised that at the last meeting it was agreed that the work of the Standards Committee should appear on the Rochford District Council website to publicise the activity of the Committee and increase awareness, and this was being followed up in tandem with the re-design of the Council's website.

Resolved

That the report on South Essex Independent Members Forum held at Basildon District Council on 3 October 2006 be noted and the work of the Rochford Independent Members within the Forum be endorsed. (CD(IS))

The meeting closed at 8.25pm.

Chairman

Date