

Standards Committee – 6 July 2011

Minutes of the meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **6 July 2011** when there were present:-

DISTRICT MEMBERS

Cllr Mrs C A Weston (Vice-Chairman)

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

Mr D J Cottis (Chairman)

Mr M G Drage

Mr S Shadbolt

Mrs L Walker

PARISH MEMBERS

Cllr P Beckers

Cllr Mrs L A Vingoe

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs C I Black, Mrs H L A Glynn, D Merrick and Mrs M J Webster.

OFFICERS PRESENT

A Bugeja - Head of Legal, Estates and Member Services

M Power - Committee Administrator

163 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

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

164 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 April 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

An addendum to Item 7 'Local Investigations and Determinations – Annual Summary 2010/11' was distributed to the Committee.

Members requested that a short refresher training session be held for Assessment Sub-Committee Members immediately prior to commencement of the Sub-Committee.

It was felt that there needs to be in place a system of using a substitute Member should it be known in advance that a Member of the Group allocated to the Assessment/Review/Hearing will not be available to attend a Sub-Committee meeting. Under this system an alternative Member will be drawn from one of the other Groups, alphabetically and on a rota basis. This will ensure that, where possible, the Sub-Committee will be appropriately represented.

Resolved

- (1) 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 P A Capon with Cllr Mrs M J Webster in Group A.
- (2) That a system of using a substitute Member, should it be known in advance that a Member of the Group in question will not be available to attend a Sub-Committee meeting, be introduced, alphabetically and on a rota basis.
- (3) That the Annual Summary of Local Investigations and Determinations for the 2010/11 Municipal Year be received. (HLEMS)

166 THE LOCALISM BILL AND DEVELOPMENT OF A REPLACEMENT STANDARDS FRAMEWORK

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Legal, Estates and Member Services on progress in developing arrangements for a Standards framework, as agreed by Council (Minute 120/11 refers), following the proposed abolition of the current statutory Standards regime.

The Localism Bill has completed its second reading in the House of Lords and current thinking of the Lords is that there ought to be a structure in place that obliges Councils to adopt a Code of Conduct and retain a Standards Committee. It was noted that until the new legislation comes into effect the current Standards regime will continue to apply.

The public legal partnership, comprising authorities from Essex, Suffolk and Hertfordshire, is working together to design a common framework for discussion and consideration by their respective authorities. An advantage of a common approach is the opportunity for greater certainty and efficiencies in authorities that have geographical proximity. Draft documentation produced by the partnership will be the subject of detailed consultation but it will be a matter for each individual Council to determine the nature and extent of the arrangements it wishes to adopt.

In response to questions concerning the feasibility of a joint approach to developing a new standards framework it was emphasised that this would facilitate the task and could provide opportunities for efficiencies and opportunities for joint working if there was commonality in approach. Whilst it was recognised in the parliamentary debates that the role of Independent Members was of value in dealing with matters of discipline and regulatory arrangements, it would be a matter for individual Councils to determine their involvement, subject to any changes in the proposed legislation.

The question was raised about the position of Parish/Town Councils and their apparent removal from the framework and regulation. However, it would remain open for them to participate in arrangements put in place by the Council and they would be consulted on any proposals for a new framework.

Recommended to Council

That the Council participates in the partnership project to develop a model standards framework, following the abolition of the current statutory Standards regime, for consideration and consultation with other stakeholders, including Parish and Town Councils. (HLEMS)

The meeting closed at 8.10 pm.

Chairman

Date

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