

Standards Committee – 12 April 2007

Minutes of the meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **12 April 2007** when there were present:-

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

Cllr Mrs S A Harper

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

Mr D J Cottis
Mr B M Flynn

PARISH MEMBERS

Cllr R E Vingoe, Hockley Parish Council

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr C I Black, Parish Cllr M J Steptoe and Independent Member Mr S C Shadbolt

OFFICERS PRESENT

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

119 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

120 MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

(1) Item from the Review Committee

The Committee considered the recommendation received from the Review Committee under the below item which included provision for enforcement training.

(2) Member Training and Development Programme 2007/08

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services on the proposals for the Member Training and Development Programme for 2007/08, which also detailed the Member attendance at training courses in 2006/07.

During discussion, the Committee noted that:-

- In looking at the Members' training attendances of the 2006/07 programme it was concerning that a high level of Members had not complied with the decision set by Council on 27 June 2006 that all Members of the Development Control Committee (i.e. all Councillors) should attend two planning training sessions totalling four hours in each municipal year, or make alternative arrangements with officers if unable to attend scheduled sessions.
- It would be worthy for the Monitoring Officer to write to those Members who had attended less than 2 hours worth of planning training to draw their attention to this and recommend that they make every effort to complete this commitment in the coming year.
- It would be appropriate for the tour of the district to be included in next year's training programme and to qualify as 2 hours towards the recommended total number of hours of planning training for a Member as this was a useful and interesting exercise which was valuable for Members to attend.
- Notwithstanding that overall attendance figures looked disappointingly low, it should be recognised that the reasons for non-attendance at training sessions can be wide and varied
- Parish Councillor attendances seemed higher than that of the previous municipal year which was pleasing and encouraging.
- The Speed Reading courses that had taken place had been positively received by many and suggestions were made that this could be offered again, particularly for new Members.
- The wording used in the Members training booklet and in separate course communication could be seen as significant in attracting and being appealing to Members. Officers were asked to consider this point.
- It could be said that there needs to be a genuine interest and/or development need of a Member for appropriate learning to take place and, therefore, it may prove unsuccessful to have a more forceful approach towards imposing training. However, there would be merit in officers developing a recommended standard level of training to establish expectations and assist Members.
- Members' Training should be recognised as 'continual improvement' and it would be useful for Members to be reminded of this. The Monitoring Officer would write to the Group Leaders to reinforce the reasons behind the programme.
- Costs for using external training providers could be substantial and equate to less value for money than the training provided internally with a lower level of attendances.

- By nature there will be diversity in training providers and an individuals' opinion and interpretation of the course they have attended.
- It still felt premature to work towards the East of England Charter for Elected Member Development as this appeared to be a time consuming programme for both officers and Members.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- Council on 27 June 2006 had decided against imposing sanctions. Their decision was 'that all Members of the Development Control Committee should attend two planning training sessions totalling four hours in each municipal year, or make alternative training arrangements with officers if unable to attend scheduled sessions'
- The Members' training attendances spreadsheet (at appendix 1) is the latest version of a previous format adopted for this purpose. The Committee may wish to consider the approach they believe would be most useful and beneficial in terms of producing and reviewing such figures going forward.
- The Member training and development questionnaire – review of 2006/07 (at appendix 3) aimed to establish reasons for non-attendance as officers recognise the importance in addressing any issues and making improvements wherever necessary. Additionally, apologies are received in the office from Members that notify in advance of their absence.
- External training providers are used particularly in covering specialist subjects and skill sets. Experienced and recommended consultants are preferred, to offer a high quality in training and maximise the opportunity.
- The East of England Charter for Elected Member Development is not mandatory but is becoming more popular with other Councils. The 'ward visits' were formal walkabouts with the chief officer and a Members' own development plan would form part of the Charter.

Resolved

- (1) That the summary of Members' attendance at training sessions during the municipal year 2006/07 as set out in paragraph 2 of the report be noted, and furthermore that the Monitoring Officer write to those Members who had not attended a minimum 2 hours planning training sessions.
- (2) That the responses from the review of the 2006/07 training and development programme as set out in paragraph 3 of the report be noted.
- (3) That the proposals for the Member Training and Development Programme for 2007/08 as set out in paragraph 5 of the report be agreed, subject to:-

The tour of the district organised once a year by the Head of Planning & Transportation being formally recognised as qualifying towards 2 hours of the recommended planning training commitments of a Member in a given municipal year.

The Monitoring Officer writing to Group Leaders to highlight the importance of training for Members.

Officers to look into introducing a standard for the level of training in a given municipal year, as guidance for Members. (HAMS)

121 STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND STUDY INTO THE OPERATION OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The Committee received the report of the Corporate Director (Internal Services) which presented a summary of the results of surveys undertaken by the Standards Board for England (SBE) into the arrangements within local authorities of the operation and role of Standards Committees.

Resolved

That the Standards Board for England Study into the operation of Standards Committees within local authorities be noted. (CD(IS))

122 CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Internal Services) on the revised Code of Conduct for Members.

Introducing this item and responding to questions, the Corporate Director (Internal Services) advised that:-

- A copy of the revised Code of Conduct tabled and put before Parliament on 4 April 2007 had been circulated to all Members on 5 April 2007 under separate cover to the report.
- Councils must adopt the new Code within six months from 2 April 2007, thus by 1 October 2007. The Standards Board for England strongly recommend authorities to do so at the first opportunity and without amendment except for the inclusion of the ten General Principles of conduct.
- Main changes include to simplify and clarify the Code in general, amendments to the rules on interests, provision that the Code will only apply to Members' conduct in their private lives where such conduct results in a criminal conviction and to allow Members with a prejudicial interest to speak but not vote at meetings.

The Committee considered that it would be of value if the Monitoring Officer provided all Town/Parish Councils Clerks with a summary of the changes. This could also be copied to all Councillors.

Recommended to Full Council

That the revised Code of Conduct for Members be adopted without amendment (except for inclusion of the ten General Principles) to come into force on 5th May 2007. (CD(IS))

The meeting closed at 8:25pm.

Chairman

Date

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