

Standards Committee – 14 April 2005

Minutes of the meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **14 April 2005** when there were present:-

Cllr J M Pullen (Chairman)
Cllr P A Capon

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

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

PARISH MEMBER

Cllr R E Vingoe, Hockley Parish Council

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs S A Harper, C A Hungate, and C J Lumley.

OFFICERS PRESENT

A Bugeja	- Head of Legal Services
S Fowler	- Head of Administrative & Member Services
M Martin	- Committee Administrator

164 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

165 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr Comber declared a personal interest in the item on Sutton Parish Council by virtue of his involvement with the Parish Council's sign.

166 SUTTON PARISH COUNCIL – REQUEST FOR DISPENSATION

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) seeking the Committee's agreement to a dispensation under S81(4) of the Local Government Act 2000 for Sutton Parish Council.

Members noted that this was the first application received by the District Council, whereby all Members of a Parish Council had declared an interest in a particular issue.

Members were in agreement that as the proposed lighting of the Parish Council's sign would benefit the whole community, they would be very pleased to grant a dispensation on this occasion.

Resolved

That a dispensation be granted to Sutton Parish Council to allow a decision to be taken by the full Council on work to be carried out to provide lighting for the Sutton Parish Council sign. (CD(LP&A))

167 MEMBER TRAINING PROGRAMME 2005/06

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative & Member Services inviting Members to give consideration to the proposals for the Member Training Programme for 2005/06. The training programme took account of the priority areas identified both in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Improvement Plan and the needs of Members.

In noting the details of attendance at training courses in 2004/05, the Committee agreed that it would be beneficial to survey Members prior to the commencement of the forthcoming year's programme to ascertain whether there are any particular issues that hindered attendance, such as the venue/timing of courses.

During discussion, the following points were noted:-

- officers anticipated that the outcome of the bid for additional funding for the CPA Improvement Plan would be successful.
- Members were very pleased with the current level of training, which they considered had become more purposeful and constructive in recent years.
- the 22 replies received to the recent questionnaire represented a response of just under 50%.
- some Members have a preference for training courses to be held in the Freight House, Rochford in view of the fact that geographically it is better situated for those living in the more outlying parts of the district.
- Members were in agreement that whilst a significant sum of money was being spent on the provision of buffets, they were nevertheless welcome.
- a strategic approach to Member development with a 3-strand approach to the training programme, as recommended by the Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA) was welcomed.
- it would be possible to select a number of relevant options from the IDeA's Modern Members' Programme and tailor them to suit the needs of this Council.
- the term 'Gershon' referred to the recent Government initiative that requires all local authorities to deliver efficiency savings following a review by Sir Peter Gershon. Each Council has to demonstrate savings of 7.5%, half of which must be cashable. The Council will be expected to achieve

the savings it has indicated and will be assessed on how it is delivering these efficiencies as part of the ongoing CPA process.

- in relation to the East of England Charter for Elected Member Development the cost of £1,000 would be for the support and assistance to be offered in working towards the Charter.

As a result of the discussion, the following was agreed:-

- it would be sensible to continue to ask Members at the enrolment stage to indicate whether they required a buffet.
- that for the forthcoming year courses should be evenly split between the Rochford and Rayleigh parts of the District, although consideration should also be given to whether any of the Parish Councils might be able to offer suitable venues. This should be reviewed at the end of the year.
- responses to the questionnaire indicated a strong preference for a variety of methods of delivery and these should be employed during future training sessions
- consideration should be given to setting aside a section of the Council's intranet so that Councillors would be able to access handouts electronically
- training sessions should be actively promoted at the time of issuing the programme, for example at the end of a meeting of Full Council.

The Committee felt that it was premature to work toward the East of England's Charter for Member Development as a framework for the training was just being developed. The Council's CPA had indicated satisfaction with the general direction of the Member training programme but the subsequent Improvement Plan had indicated priority areas, as detailed in the report.

Resolved

- (1) That the summary report of Members' attendance at training sessions during 2004/05 be noted.
- (2) That Members be surveyed prior to the commencement of the forthcoming year's programme to ascertain whether there are any particular issues that hinder attendance.
- (3) That the proposals for the Member Training Programme for 2005/06 as set out in paragraph 6 of the report be agreed, subject to the Committee's detailed comments being taken into account during the preparation of the Member training programme.
- (4) That the East of England Charter for Member Development be not adopted at this stage.
- (5) That the potential developments for future years training programmes be noted. (HAMS)

168 “GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT” – REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

The Committee received the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) and noted the conclusions of the Committee on Standards in Public Life in their recent publication “Getting the Balance Right” and, in particular, implications for the role of Standards Committees.

169 CODE FOR THE FUTURE – STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND CONSULTATION

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) seeking Members’ views on a consultation document from the Standards Board for England entitled “A Code for the future”.

In considering the suggested responses to questions, the following points were noted:-

- Questions 12-15 – Councillors ought to be more effectively safeguarded from false, malicious and politically motivated allegations.
- Questions 16-21 – Declaration of a personal interest does not preclude discussion and subsequent voting from taking place. Where a personal relationship is involved, the extent of the relationship and degree of involvement with that person needs to be considered before deciding whether it is a prejudicial interest. The test is whether a reasonable member of the public informed of all the facts, would consider the interest to effect a Member’s judgement. A cautious approach is to be recommended rather than a Member becoming exposed to the risk of criticism or complaint.
- Questions 26-29 – Members agreed that if there is a need to decline an offer of a gift or hospitality, it should nevertheless be declared.

Resolved

That the Committee’s response to the consultation from the Standards Board for England entitled “A Code for the future” should be as outlined in the officer’s report, with the following amendment to the response to question 27:-

- Members should declare offers of gifts and hospitality even if declined.
(CD(LP&A))

170 FOURTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) advising Members of the programme for the Fourth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees and inviting the Committee to determine the delegates to attend the Fourth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees.

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Resolved

That Cllr J M Pullen, Mr A C Comber and Mr B M Flynn attend the Fourth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees. (CD(LP&A))

The meeting closed at 9.06 pm.

Chairman

Date