

Standards Committee - 13 July 2004

Minutes of the meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **13 July 2004** when there were present:-

Cllr J M Pullen (Chairman)
Cllr C A Hungate (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr P A Capon
Cllr Mrs S A Harper

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

Mr A C Comber
Mr B M Flynn

PARISH MEMBER

Cllr R E Vingoe, Hockley Parish Council

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr D J Cottis and Cllr C J Lumley

OFFICERS PRESENT

R J Honey - Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration)
S Fowler - Head of Administrative and Member Services
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Chairman welcomed the recently appointed new Members.

312 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

313 MEMBER TRAINING PROGRAMME 2004/05

Note: Mr A C Comber declared a personal interest in this item by virtue of his involvement with the supply of e-procurement training to Essex County Council.

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services that set out proposals for the competency training programme 2004/05.

It was noted that the arrangement whereby training venues were alternated between the Civic Suite, Rayleigh and the Freight House, Rochford on a two thirds/one third basis had emanated from the outcome of a previous Member survey. It was observed that, from the perspective of accessibility by public

transport, Rochford was particularly well located. It was also observed that preferences could change with changes in Council membership. The Committee concurred with the Chairman that it would be appropriate to retain current practice for forthcoming training sessions following which the allocation of venues could be reviewed.

In discussing the e-government target to "establish an e-skills training programme for Council Members with a recognised basic level of attainment" a Member observed that it was likely that the quality of various recognised attainment courses would vary. The Committee endorsed a suggestion emanating from recent contact with the County Council that a questionnaire be sent to all Members with a view to clarifying training needs.

A Member referred to the challenges facing newly elected Councillors in terms of both developing an early understanding of meetings protocol and tackling high volumes of new information. It was noted that the Members' Useful Information Guide contained a section on information for new Councillors that covered aspects of meetings protocol. It was also recognised that last year's training programme had included a session on the application of Council Rules of Procedure and that further training on procedure rules not covered by the previous session was proposed in Part 1 of the Competency Programme. The Committee concurred with the Chairman that consideration should be given in advance of the next elections to possibilities for the provision of guidance on protocol for new Members.

With regard to the current induction training programme, the Head of Administrative and Member Services confirmed that she would consult the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on the provision of separate guidance for those Members unable to attend the course on decriminalised parking enforcement. Referring to community safety, the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) advised that the Chief Executive was currently considering the possibilities for some training in the autumn that would assist Members in understanding community safety in the context of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy.

Competency Training Part 1

The Committee reviewed the proposed Part 1 Schedule.

With regard to training on new licensing functions, the Head of Administrative and Member Services advised that the training provider would be consulted on the possibility of providing a bespoke evening session for any Members unable to attend the training scheduled for 20 October.

With regard to press/public relations skills training, a Member referred to concern that can be felt by a newly elected Councillor that they will not have the confidence/skills to respond to press enquiries. Reference was made to the type of situations that could point to the value of training for Councillors in how to deal with media contact. It is important that Members are professional in dealings with the media given that, when representing the Council, a

Councillor provides the public with an impression of the nature of the Council. It was observed that it could be appropriate to introduce the term "highly recommended" for some courses, in particular those related to dealing with the media and delivery of the planning service.

It was noted that it would be of value for Members to have an understanding of the requirements of the Investors in People standard.

Competency Training Part 2

The Committee reviewed the proposed Part 2 Schedule

It was noted that the internal/external audit training would now be held on 2 February, with the training on e-government and the delivery of Council services on 23 February.

The Head of Administrative and Member Services confirmed that Parish/Town Councils were offered a place on each appropriate training session.

Resolved

That the proposed competency training programme 2004/05 be approved subject to:-

- Consideration being given to the allocation of training venues for future training programmes.
- The distribution of a questionnaire to all Members of the Council to clarify IT/e-skills training needs.
- Future consideration being given to the provision of guidance on meetings protocol in time for this to be given to any new Members joining the Council at the next elections.
- Consultation with the new licensing functions training provider on the possibility of providing a bespoke evening session for any Members unable to attend the training scheduled for 20 October.
- The provision of training for all Members of the Council on how to deal with media contact. This training (along with training on delivery of the planning service) to be categorised as highly recommended.
- Consultation with the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on the provision of separate guidance for those Members unable to attend the induction course on decriminalised parking enforcement. (HAMS)

314 IDeA MODERN MEMBERS CONFERENCE

The Committee received a report from Mr B M Flynn on his attendance at the Improvement and Development Agency's Modern Members Conference held at Bridgewater Hall, Manchester on 2 July 2004.

Mr Flynn tabled a paper that set out the skills framework for Councillors and Council Leaders and summarised the conference. A key message was that this is the first time work has been undertaken to identify the core skills associated with the role of Councillor. Councils should do all that they can to assist Councillors in their roles and investment in aspects such as new technology is a factor in developing Councillor performance.

It was observed that the IDeA may well be able to facilitate training for District Councillors in areas such as Overview and Scrutiny.

The Committee thanked Mr Flynn for attending the conference and for his report. Mr Flynn indicated that, should it be considered of value, he would be prepared to produce a further paper setting out the positive and negative aspects associated with the skills framework for Councillors as identified at the conference. Members agreed that this would be a very useful document.

315 RECORD OF ATTENDANCE AT COMMITTEE MEETINGS 2003/04

The Committee received the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services on the summary of Members' attendance at meetings during 2003/04.

An Independent Member observed that the attendance statistics were commendable. There was some discussion around the difficulties of presenting such statistics in a form that covers all possible variables and reference was made to the fact that a Councillor appointed to a small number of Committees could achieve a high attendance percentage whilst having attended less meetings than someone with a higher number of appointments. It was also observed that attendance of substitutes had not been incorporated in the overall percentage of attendances.

316 THIRD ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

The Committee considered the nomination of three delegates to attend the Third Annual Assembly of Standards Committees taking place on 13 and 14 September at the International Conference Centre, Birmingham.

It was noted that three places had been reserved. It was also noted that, should Standards Committee Members have difficulty attending, there is no reason why other Members of the Council could not be given the opportunity to attend.

Resolved

That the opportunity to be nominated as a delegate to attend the Third Annual Assembly also be made available to all Members of the Council. (CD(L,P&A))

The meeting closed at 8.32pm

Chairman

Date