

## **Standards Committee – 1 October 2009**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **1 October 2009** when there were present:-

Vice-Chairman: Cllr D Merrick

Cllr P A Capon

Cllr M J Steptoe

Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn

### **INDEPENDENT MEMBERS**

Chairman: Mr D J Cottis

Mr M G Drage

Mr S Shadbolt

### **PARISH MEMBERS**

Cllr P Beckers

Cllr Mrs D Constable

Cllr Mrs L A Vingoe

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs L Walker.

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

J Honey	-	Corporate Director (Internal Services)
S Fowler	-	Head of Information and Customer Services
D Britnell	-	Personal Assistant
M Power	-	Committee Administrator

### **237 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **238 PROMOTING HIGHER STANDARDS**

Members considered the report of the Corporate Director (Internal Services) on the characteristics of a well-performing Standards Committee and the initiatives that this Council might take to promote higher standards.

The Committee considered the draft Action Plan, which detailed actions that would raise the profile and understanding of the Ethical Governance agenda and the work of the Standards Committee both internally and externally. The following points arose during discussion:-

- The Monitoring Officer would append the quarterly bulletins produced by the Standards Board to the Members' Bulletin as well as any other issues of interest relating to the Standards Committee.
- The need for Parish Members of the Standards Committee as well as the Independent Members to have a good understanding of how the business of the Council is conducted was recognised. The Head of Information and Customer Services would send written invitations to the Independent and Parish Members of the Standards Committee to attend specific Development Control, Executive and full Council meetings.
- Information of the role/work of the Standards Committee could be included in the monthly staff briefing notes from Senior Management Team to Council staff.

### **Resolved**

That the draft action plan containing a programme of initiatives to promote higher standards of behaviour within the authority is agreed, subject to the amendment of the wording as follows: 'Ensure Independent Members and Parish Members of the Standards Committee have a good understanding of how the business of the Council is conducted.' (CD(IS))

## **239 LOCAL INVESTIGATIONS AND DETERMINATIONS**

The Committee received the report of the Corporate Director (Internal Services) with details of local investigation and determination hearings since May 2008.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That an annual summary of local investigation and determination hearings, in the format of Appendix 1 of the report, be provided at the last meeting of the Standards Committee in each municipal year.
- (2) That a copy of the note of any Sub-Committee meeting be included on the agenda of the following Standards Committee. (CD(IS))

## **240 SCHEDULE OF ATTENDANCE AT COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Information & Customer Services on the schedule of attendance at Committee meetings following consultation with other Authorities.

It was noted that attendance figures do not necessarily provide an accurate picture of what Councillors do and can therefore be misleading. There will continue to be internal monitoring by officers in the context of the six month rule (the rule whereby failure to attend a meeting over a six month period has implications for Local Authority membership).

**Resolved**

That the practice of receiving a schedule of attendance at Committee meetings is discontinued. (HICS)

**241 DISPENSATION FROM MANDATORY TRAINING PROCEDURE**

Members considered the report of the Head of Information & Customer Services proposing the introduction of a procedure in respect of applications for dispensation from mandatory training requirements.

During discussion, the following was noted:-

- Literature that was being produced by the Council for prospective candidates standing for election to the Council should include details of when mandatory training will be taking place.
- In exceptional circumstances a procedure could be put in place whereby authority could be delegated to officers, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman, to make a decision regarding applications for dispensation from mandatory training; this decision would be reported to the next meeting of the Standards Committee. This procedure should be included on the paperwork sent to Members requesting dispensation.
- As part of the work done towards the Charter for Elected Member Development it had been agreed that all dates for Member training in the forthcoming year would be provided to Members in the January and that mandatory training dates would be specified.
- It was recognised that due to the quasi-judicial nature of the Committees for which training is mandatory, it would be necessary to attach a condition to any dispensations granted stating how long the dispensation would remain valid, which would be dependent of the availability of alternative training, either by Council officers or independent training companies.
- There was discussion that the current system whereby Members request dispensation by explaining in a letter to the Standards Committee be retained but it was agreed that the use of a revised version of the form attached as an appendix to the report would be useful.
- It was recognised that the draft dispensation report contained useful examples of what may be regarded as reasons for granting dispensation but that there were other reasons that might also be considered. It was decided that the draft form, attached as an appendix to the report, should be amended by deleting the stated reasons for requesting dispensation. Instead, space should be provided for Members to detail the specific reason for their request for dispensation. This would allow the Committee greater flexibility when reviewing requests for dispensation.

- It was agreed that, where appropriate, Members should produce documentation to support their application for dispensation; this should be stated on the application form.
- It may be useful for there to be two mandatory planning-related training sessions in May, held at least two weeks apart. Alternatively, the daytime and evening sessions could be held on different days, again held at least two weeks apart. Another suggestion was that static dates for the mandatory May training be established.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That a form of application to the Standards Committee for dispensation from mandatory training requirements, with amendments to the draft form as detailed above, be adopted.
- (2) That in circumstances where a Member wishes to apply for dispensation after a scheduled meeting of the Standards Committee but prior to a mandatory training event, authority is delegated to the Head of Information and Customer Services, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Standards Committee, to determine an application, with a report on the outcome into the next scheduled Committee meeting. (HICS)

## **242 MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2009/10 – MID-PROGRAMME REVIEW**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Information & Customer Services containing the mid-programme review of the 2009-10 Member Learning and Development programme.

Members were advised that Part 2 of the 2009/10 would be trialling the use of the conference room at King Edmund school in Rochford. In response to concerns expressed regarding car parking arrangements at the school, it was agreed that officers would raise the matter with the school to seek reassurances. It was agreed that the school should be used on this occasion but that future training could be held elsewhere if it proved unsuitable as a venue. It was noted that the new facilities at Rochford Hospital may be an option for future training.

### **Resolved**

That the 2009/10 Member Learning and Development Mid-Programme review is noted. (HICS)

The meeting closed at 21.04.

Chairman .....

Date .....

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