

Standards Committee

Thursday, 10 December 2009

Present: Tony Ellwood (Independent Chair), Councillor Mike Devaney (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Debra Platt, Stella Walsh, Hugh Evans (Independent Member), Gwynne Furlong (Independent Member), Joan Geddes (Parish Council representative), Bill Mason (Parish Council representative) and Alan Platt (Parish Council representative)

Officers in attendance: Andrew Docherty (Director of Governance - Monitoring Officer) and Ruth Rimmington (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

10.S.108 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Judith Boothman and Cath Hoyle.

10.S.109 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 17 September 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

10.S.110 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

No interests were declared by Committee Members in respect of items on the agenda.

10.S.111 DVD REGARDING LOCAL ASSESSMENT OF COMPLAINTS AND DISCUSSION REGARDING TRAINING

The Committee watched a DVD produced by Standards for England relating to Local Assessment. Members found the DVD useful and noted it showed the options available to an Assessment Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED

- 1. The DVD be noted,**
- 2. Training, both for Members of the Committee and Town, Parish and Borough Councillors, be made a standing item on the agenda.**

10.S.112 NEWS FROM STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND

The Monitoring Officer advised that the work of the Adjudication Panel will transfer into the new General Regulatory Chamber in January 2010 and will from that date, be known as First-Tier Tribunal (Local Government Standards, England).

RESOLVED - The update be noted.

10.S.113 CASES UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer presented a report outlining recent cases which had been considered nationally.

Members queried points on several cases, in particular the Suffolk County Council and Barnoldswick Town Council cases.

It was reported that there had been no new cases since the last meeting, with one case currently the subject of an external investigation. A Standards Sub-Committee Consideration would be held before Christmas to receive the investigation report.

RESOLVED - The update be noted.

10.S.114 FEEDBACK FROM VISITS TO PARISH COUNCILS

Members of the Committee reported that the visits undertaken so far had been positive. If there were any queries these should be directed to the Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED - The update be noted.

10.S.115 BRINGING STANDARDS INTO FOCUS 2009 ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

The Committee received a report on the recent Annual Assembly of Standards Committees attended by the Chair and Democratic and Member Services Officer.

Attendance at the Assembly had confirmed that Standards Committee at Chorley had well established practices and procedures and was way ahead many others, with the Parish mentoring scheme and experience of dealing with local assessment and hearings.

The revised Code was now expected in November / December 2009 for adoption in May 2010.

The Chair received clarification from Paul Hoey, Standards for England, that Parish Council clerks did not need to take any action with the notification of the decision of Assessment Sub- Committees.

Some future development suggestions were made at the discussion forum session and these were discussed.

The Committee undertook a quiz "Putting the public in the picture - what does your authority's website say about standards?" which had been developed for one of the sessions at the Assembly. The score was 105 indicating the Standards Committee was probably well-represented on the authority's website.

RESOLVED –

- 1. The report and quiz be noted,**
- 2. To review the complaint form at the next meeting,**
- 3. To invite the Chief Executive and group leaders to meet the Committee prior to a future meeting of the Committee,**
- 4. To consider offering training to Parish Councillors based on the Neighbourhood Working areas,**
- 5. To resend the Governance Toolkit for Parish & Town Councils to all Town and Parish Council clerks.**

10.S.116 DISCUSSIONS REGARDING PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Monitoring Officer reported that a case had been reported nationally where the Standards Committee had received negative press locally. A Councillor had been accused of an incident, but in their private life, and the Standards Committee had been unable to take any action.

This was not something the Chorley Standards Committee could proactively act on, but needed to be aware off.

RESOLVED – The discussion be noted.

10.S.117 WORK UNDERTAKEN TO PROMOTE THE CODE OF CONDUCT

The Monitoring Officer presented an update on the work undertaken to promote the Code of Conduct this quarter.

Details of the Parish Council mentoring scheme had been forward to all Town and Parish clerks and Members of the Committee.

Following the Standards Sub-Committee common issues and specific queries on several had been raised had been highlighted with Town and Parish clerks and Borough Councillors.

Training had been held on the Code of Conduct, with both Borough and Parish Council Members being in attendance.

An article highlighting some guidance from Standards for England relating to gifts and hospitality had been promoted within “intheknow” in November. A reminder to update financial and other interests forms had been scheduled for December.

An informal Lancashire network had been set up. The purpose of this was to allow officers who support the Standards Committee to raise practical queries and share information and best practice gained through experience of local assessment and determinations. More detailed legal queries would still be referred to Monitoring Officers and ACSeS.

An electronic case management system had been implemented which would enable officers to manage allegations more efficiently.

RESOLVED – The update be noted.

10.S.118 STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Work Programme. The draft annual report and the complaint form would be considered at the next meeting.

RESOLVED – The Work Programme be noted.

Chair