

Standards Committee

Thursday, 16 June 2011

Present: Councillors Debra Platt (Vice Chair in the Chair), Marie Gray, Stella Walsh, Gwynne Furlong (Independent Member), Bill Mason (Parish Council representative) and Tony Wilson (Parish Council Representative)

Officers in attendance: Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer) and Alex Jackson (Senior Lawyer)

11.S.01 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

The Vice Chair, Councillor Debra Platt took the Chair.

11.S.02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the Chair Tony Ellwood and Hugh Evans (Independent Members) and Councillors Cath Hoyle and Marion Lowe.

11.S.03 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

No declarations of any interest were received.

11.S.04 MINUTES

That the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 9 December 2010 be held as a correct record for signing by the Chair.

11.S.05 CURRENT STATE OF THE STANDARDS REGIME

The Senior Solicitor, Alex Jackson provided Members with an update on the abolition of the Standards Regime. It was explained that there are provisions in the Localism Bill:

- to abolish Standards for England
- to remove the Standards for England jurisdiction over member conduct
- to remove the national Code of Conduct for councillors and the requirement to have a standards committee
- to allow councils to choose whether or not they wish to have a local code or a standards committee
- to create a criminal offence relating to failure to register or declare interests. Prosecutions will only be able to be brought with permission of DPP (fine £5000)

Provisionally the Standards Board anticipate that they will stop investigating complaints in late 2011 and be abolished in early 2012.

Transitional arrangements are now in place and Members considered the impact of these particularly in view of the fact that under the new arrangements Parish Councils would be responsible for their own conduct issues.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

11.S.06 ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received a report updating them on the progress of matters considered by the Standards Assessment Sub Committee.

The Assessment Sub Committee had been convened on two occasions since the last meeting of the Standards Committee on 9 December 2010.

The first matter had been referred to the Monitoring Officer for investigation and in consultation with the Chair of Standards Committee and the Members of the Sub Committee, had now been discontinued.

The second matter had also been referred for investigation and was still progressing. The Monitoring Officer expected to report on his findings to the next Committee.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

11.S.07 TRAINING UPDATE REPORT

The Committee were informed of the training that had been provided to new Members of the Borough and Parish Councils.

At the recent local elections 7 new Members were elected on to Chorley Council. A training session was held on 6 June 2011, aimed specifically at the new Members but open to all Members of the Council and newly elected Parish Councillors.

The session was presented by the Council's Monitoring Officer along with the Chair of the Standards Committee, and provided an overview of the Council's Code of Conduct. Handouts were provided and a copy of the slide show presentation was obtained from Standards for England.

Scenarios were also used in the training to enable those attending to put the principle considered into practice.

The session was well attended with 10 Borough Members and 7 Parish Councillors attending. All but one of the new Chorley Councillors attended and a further session will be provided on a one-to-one basis for the Member concerned.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

11.S.08 TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS MENTORING SCHEME

The main aim of the scheme is to was promote awareness of the Code of Conduct and the Chorley Standards Committee.

The mentors would act as a contact point for queries and attend meetings of their allocated Town and Parish Councils at least once a year. Mentors would not give advice on specific cases or deliver detailed training as these should be referred to the Monitoring Officer. Members of the Committee had been allocated different Parish Councils so that they could widen their experiences.

The mentoring scheme was offered in addition to the training every year for Parish Councils.

RESOLVED – That the Democratic and Member Services Officer would write to Committee members and Parish Council clerks to confirm the details.

11.S.09 STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND - CASES UPDATE

The Committee received a verbal report outlining recent cases that had been considered nationally by the First –tier Tribunal (Local Government Standards in England) around treating Members with respect.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

11.S.10 APPOINTMENT OF STANDARDS SUB COMMITTEE

The Chair advised the Committee that the purpose of the Sub-Committee was to review the financial and other interests registers for both Borough and Parish Councillors.

Most of the annual returns had been receipted and would soon be ready for inspection.

The meetings of the Sub-Committee had already been agreed as part of the calendar of meeting for the year and were to be held on 7 September 2011 and 22 February 2012.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the update be noted.**
- 2. That the membership of the Standards Sub-Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year be Tony Ellwood (Independent Member), Gwynne Furlong (Independent Member) and Bill Mason (Parish Councillor)**

Chair