

Standards Committee

Thursday, 18 September 2008

Present: Mr Ellwood (Independent Chair) and Councillor Thomas McGowan and Rev John Cree (Independent Member)

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

Also in attendance: Alan Cornwell (Reserve Parish Council Member)

08.S.46 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Keith Iddon, Judith Boothman, Debra Platt and Stella Walsh, also Joan Geddes (Parish Representative).

08.S.47 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

No Members declared an interest in respect of items on the agenda.

08.S.48 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 5 June 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

08.S.49 NEWS FROM THE STANDARDS BOARD/ADJUDICATION PANEL

The Committee received the report of the Monitoring Officer outlining several recent cases that have been considered nationally rather than locally.

Members noted that a consultation document was due to be published regarding “codes of conduct for local authority members and employees”. This document would be presented to a future meeting for consideration and comment.

The Monitoring Officer advised that, on a quarterly basis, complaints information was required to be provided to the Standards Board for England and that the first return had been submitted.

RESOLVED –

- 1. That the report be noted,**
- 2. To have a standing agenda item to consider cases dealt with by the Adjudication Panel.**

08.S.50 FEEDBACK FROM VISITS TO PARISH COUNCILS

Members updated the Committee on their visits to Parish Councils. The feedback generally was positive and the visits achieved the aim of raising awareness of the Committee and its’ role.

RESOLVED – That the schedule recording visits to Parish Councils be updated, including visits made by Committee Members who were not present at the meeting.

08.S.51 WORK UNDERTAKEN TO PROMOTE THE CODE OF CONDUCT

The Monitoring Officer reported that a training session, on the Code of Conduct, had been held in July attended by Parish and Borough Councillors. Committee members had also undertaken the local assessment training exercise prepared by the Standards Board for England.

As agreed at the previous meeting, information on the revised process for dealing with complaints against Councillors had been published on the Council's website and forwarded to Parish Council clerks.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

08.S.52 RECRUITMENT OF ADDITIONAL STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Monitoring Officer tabled a report updating the Committee on the recruitment of additional members.

For the Independent Member vacancy three candidates had attended an interview conducted by Mr Ellwood and Andrew Docherty. Mr Ellwood advised that the preferred candidate lives in Chorley. She has experience of following procedures, writing and presenting reports, weighing up evidence and chairing meetings. She demonstrated that she had researched the post and had the skills required.

For the Parish Council representatives vacancy a letter had been sent to all Parish and Town Councils within the Borough, requesting them to nominate a representative. It was noted that there would be more candidates than vacancies and an interview process would be undertaken later in the year to select a total of three Parish Council representatives.

RESOLVED –

- 1. The Council be recommended to appoint Susan Alty as an Independent Member of the Standards Committee.**
- 2. To present an update to the next meeting regarding the recruitment of Parish representatives on the Committee.**

08.S.53 WHISTLE BLOWING POLICY

The Committee considered the Council's current whistle blowing policy, enclosed with the agenda package.

It was suggested that the aim of the policy be highlighted at the beginning of the document and to have an additional sub-heading of "anonymous allegations". The inclusion of a time limit for a response to the complainant, e.g. within 10 days, was discussed. Members also felt that complaints should be made in writing, rather than orally.

The Committee recommended that reference be made in the policy to the revised procedure for complaints against Councillors under the Code of Conduct.

RESOLVED - That officers incorporate suggestions made by the Committee in the revised policy.

08.S.54 STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE

RESOLVED –

- 1. That the membership of the Standards Sub-Committee be Tony Ellwood (Chair), Rev John Cree and Councillor Thomas McGowan.**
- 2. The date of the next meeting would be 6 November 2008 at 10am.**

08.S.55 STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND GUIDANCE

Committee Members received the Standards Board for England Guidance relating to the role and make-up of standards committees, local assessment of complaints, assessment and review flowcharts, local investigations and other action and standards committee determinations.

Copies of the guidance were available in the Members Room at the Town Hall.

RESOLVED - That the updated guidance be noted and a letter sent to all parish council clerks highlighting this.

08.S.56 STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee discussed the work programme and AGREED to consider the Member Officer protocol and the “codes of conduct for local authority members and employees”, if available, at the next meeting.

Chair