

Standards Committee

Thursday, 11 December 2008

Present: Mr Ellwood (Independent Chair), Councillor (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Thomas McGowan, Debra Platt, Rev John Cree (Independent Member) and Mrs Joan Geddes (Parish Council 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)

09.S.57 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Judith Boothman and Stella Walsh.

09.S.58 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

In accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Members Code of Conduct, Joan Geddes declared a personal interest in relation to Item 8 "Update on the recruitment of additional members of the Standards Committee".

09.S.59 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 18 September 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

09.S.60 NEWS FROM THE STANDARDS BOARD

The Committee considered a briefing note from the Chair on the Annual Assembly. It was noted that when filtering allegations "alternative action" should be used carefully.

RESOLVED

- 1. The report be noted.**
- 2. The Council's website pages related to standards be reviewed.**

09.S.61 CASES CONSIDERED BY THE ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR ENGLAND

The Monitoring Officer presented a report advising Members of recent cases which have been considered nationally and to provide a general update on national developments.

The Committee discussed the cases and queried several points with the Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

09.S.62 FEEDBACK FROM VISITS TO PARISH COUNCILS

Committee Members discussed their visits to Parish Councils since the last meeting. The feedback was generally positive with visits achieving 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.

09.S.63 WORK UNDERTAKEN TO PROMOTE THE CODE OF CONDUCT

The Monitoring Officer advised that, following the recent Standards Sub-Committee letters with guidance and queries on register of interest forms were being sent to Parish Council clerks. An article would be featured on “intheknow” with guidance for Borough Councillors.

The Committee discussed methods of ensuring the register of interest forms are kept up to date. It was AGREED that when a Standards report is presented to Council a reminder be included, to have the registers available prior to meetings generally and to request Members to review their forms in May.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

09.S.64 UPDATE ON THE RECRUITMENT OF ADDITIONAL MEMBERS OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Committee discussed the report of the Monitoring Officer. It was noted that the Council had, last week, approved the appointment of the new independent member Chris Sewell. Chris had sent his apologies for the meeting as he was in London on business.

Members were advised that the guidance from the Standards Board for England recommends that there are three representatives from Parish Councils. This would ensure that sufficient Members are available to deal with local filtering decisions and reviews against those decisions and to provide some capacity in the event of Members being unavailable.

The Committee discussed the recruitment pack and noted that, in addition to Mrs Geddes, five other nominations have been made and a recruitment process therefore needed to be agreed. Consideration was given to criteria upon which to base the appointment recommendation, some suggested criteria were contained in the recruitment pack enclosed in the agenda papers and two amendments were made.

The importance of maintaining continuity with respect to terms of office was highlighted.

RESOLVED –

- 1. Each of the nominated Councillors should be invited to submit a written application setting out how they consider they meet the criteria and that this should be explored further during an interview.**
- 2. An appointment panel of three Members with a reserve be established from within the membership of the Committee to make the appointment recommendation to Council.**
- 3. That Council be recommended to increase the number of Parish Council representatives on the Standards Committee to three.**
- 4. Parish Council representatives to serve the same term of office on the Standards Committee as their term of office on the Parish Council.**
- 5. Independent members to serve a four year term of office, on a staggered basis.**

09.S.65 REAL PEOPLE, REAL POWER CODES OF CONDUCT FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY MEMBERS AND EMPLOYEES

The Committee received and considered the report of the Monitoring Officer regarding the Consultation Paper Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power Codes of Conduct for Local Authority Members and Employees received from the Department for Communities and Local Government.

RESOLVED – That the proposed responses to the consultation questions and agreed a response be submitted, with two additional points. The criteria to be a Parish Councillor should be the same as for Borough Councillors regarding the registration of their address. Beneficial interests would benefit from clarified.

09.S.66 PROTOCOL ON MEMBER-OFFICER RELATIONS

The Monitoring Officer presented the current Member-Officer relations protocol and Members discussed Councillors rights of access to information, the issue of staff lobbying members and officers attending political group meetings.

The Committee debated the potential need for a Parish Council protocol for Member-Officer relations.

RESOLVED –

- 1. A revised protocol be presented to a future meeting.**
- 2. A Parish Council protocol for Member-Officer relations be given further consideration.**

09.S.67 STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee discussed the work programme and AGREED to consider a draft an annual report of the Committee at the next meeting.

Chair