

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Standards Committee on Wednesday, 1 November 2006 in Committee Room 1, Runcorn Town Hall.

Present: Mr. W. Badrock (Chairman), Mr. Luxton and Councillors Lewis, Parker and Redhead

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Pearsall, Wharton and Parish Councillor R. Crawford.

Absence declared on Council business: (none)

Officers present: M. Simpson and J. Tradewell.

Also in attendance: (none)

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE COMMITTEE

STC10 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th September 2006, having been printed and circulated were signed as a correct record subject to the amendment that in the attendance section Cllr Luxton should have read Mr Luxton.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.

STC11 ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

The Council Solicitor fed back information from the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees. One weakness of the event was that the draft form of the new Members Code of Conduct was not ready for discussion.

It was reported that there were conversations on how to raise the profile of Standards Committee for example:

- the use of websites;
- visiting parishes; and
- other ways the Committee could be pro-active.

The Committee had a wide ranging discussion

Action

regarding the issues in the White Paper relating to Standards Committee. It was reported that, under the proposals all complaints would come to the Standards Committee. It seemed likely that the decision on whether to investigate a complaint would have to be dealt with by a Member of the Standards Committee, not the officers.

The Committee also discussed the presentation at the Assembly regarding a Chester Case, the need for the Committee to have an independent chair person, the maximum penalty under the code of conduct and the need to have clear public relations via the website with instructions regarding how to make a complaint.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

STC12 TRAINING UPDATE

The Committee received a report which provided an update on the training session held for Councillors on the Code of Conduct on the 26th September 2006. It was noted that the sessions were attended by 11 Councillors and were generally well received. The feedback sheets were detailed within the report and overall the feedback was really good.

The Committee was advised that there would be further training sessions for new Councillors on the new Code of Conduct once it was finalised. The final version should be available for the Council to adopt as of May 2007.

It was reported that there was an away day planned for the 6th December at the Halton Stadium and possible themes such as, plans for the future, the needs of Parish Councillors, what the priorities should and how they could be taken forward were discussed.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Strategic Director Corporate and Policy be invited to the Away Day; and
- (2) the Leader and Chief Executive be asked for their views on the priorities for the Committee over the next few years.

Council
Solicitor

STC13 STANDARDS BOARD INFORMATION ROUND-UP

The Committee received a report which outlined the latest news from the Standards Board. A copy of a paper entitled "A Question of Standards – Prescott's Town Hall Madness" produced by Owen Paterson MP and Gerald

Howarth MP was discussed. The two MP's paper criticised standards agenda in local government and recommended the abolition of both monitoring officers and the Standards Board. Also detailed within the report was the Standards Board's response to the paper.

The Committee had a wide ranging discussion regarding the report and it was felt that there were some points to reflect upon. Among other things it was noted that the current standards regime replaced the old rules of surcharge which most Members had been glad to see replaced.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

STC14 FEEDBACK FROM MEETING WITH THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE STANDARDS BOARD

It was reported that the Council Solicitor attended an ACSES North West Group meeting on the 22nd September 2006. The Board was advised that the session provided a useful opportunity to discuss with colleagues and senior officers from the Standards Board how the standards agenda was likely to develop over the next year or two. The points that came out during the discussion were outlined in detail within the report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

STC15 ANNUAL REPORT OF ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR ENGLAND

The Committee received a copy of the Annual Report from the Adjudication Panel for England. The report provided an interesting insight into how the standards regime looked from the perspective of the President of the Adjudication Panel.

The Committee was advised as to what the President had to say in the report about local Standards Committees. The President believed it would be better for hearings to be chaired by lawyers with experience of the Competency Framework for Chairman and Members of Tribunals. It was felt that the President's comments served to reinforce the need for some practical training for the Committee on carrying out hearings.

Concerns were raised regarding the specifics of what amounted to a significant breach of the Code of Conduct, and that it was not just about following the procedural rules

but knowing how to reach a decision. It was noted that there must be sufficient checks and balances in place to make the process work.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 4.30 p.m.