

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Standards Committee on Wednesday, 26 May 2010 Committee Room 1, Runcorn Town Hall

Present: Councillors Parker, Redhead and Swain, Mr R. Garner, Mr A. Luxton (Deputy Chair) Mrs A Morris and Parish Councillor Mr B Allen

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Murray, Mr W B. Badrock and Parish Councillor Canon D. Felix

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Reaney and A. Scott

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE COMMITTEE

STC1 WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS AND APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR

Action

The Operational Director, Legal and Democratic Services, Mr Reaney, opened the meeting and welcomed new Members to the Committee.

Nominations were invited for the appointment of chair and deputy chair for the municipal year 2010/11.

RESOLVED: That Mr W Badrock be appointed chair and Mr A Luxton be appointed deputy chair of the Standards Committee for the 2010/11 municipal year.

MR A LUXTON IN THE CHAIR

STC2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2010, having been printed and circulated, were signed as a correct record.

In noting the contents, the Committee commented on the following matters:

- the awaited issue of the revised Code of Conduct which had been expected in Autumn 2009;
- as agreed previously, an invitation be extended to a representative of Standards for England to attend a future meeting of the Committee to increase understanding of the Code of Practice;
- the availability of on-line guides on the Standards for England website (www.standardsforengland.gov.uk); and
- Mr Reaney extended the offer of additional one to one training for new Members.

Monitoring Officer

STC3 STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Resources which summarised the work of the Committee in the last municipal year.

The Committee noted that there had been four meetings in 2009/10. Details of membership and the role of the Committee were outlined in the report. During the year, Members had received a report on the local application of the systems for Declaration of Interests as well as guidance from Standards for England on the powers to suspend a Standards Committee's Assessment and Review functions, the establishment of joint Standards Committees and information on "other action" which could be taken following an assessment of a complaint. Members watched the new training DVD entitled "Assessment Made Clear", which was designed to help Members assess complaints about elected or co-opted Members.

In addition, the Committee had received regular updates of information from Standards for England and digests of cases that had been heard in other authorities. Following attendance at the Standards for England Annual Assembly in October, Mr Reaney and Councillor Wharton reported on matters of relevance.

The Committee noted that the revised version of the Members' Code of Conduct was still awaited.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and referred to Council for information.

STC4 STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND ROUND UP

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Resources which brought Members up to date on the latest news from Standards for England.

Since the last Committee meeting, Standards for England had released Bulletin 47, which was appended to the report for information. Of particular note was the transfer of functions of the (now abolished) Adjudication Panel for England to the First Tier Tribunal (Local Government Standards in England), whose role was to hear cases referred to it by Ethical Standards Officers or a Standards Committee following an investigation. The Bulletin set out the changes to the powers and procedures of the Tribunal. The issue of costs and the power to make an order for costs if the Tribunal considered that a party had acted unreasonably in bringing, defending or conducting proceedings was also noted. The Committee asked for a further report to the next meeting to provide clarification on the extent of these powers.

In addition, Members also noted the availability of online guides via the Standards for England website and the article about the benefits and downside of online social networking communication.

Details of the 2010 Annual Assembly of Standards Committees 'A Place for Standards', taking place on 19 October 2010 at the ICC Birmingham were noted. It was agreed that all Members of the Committee be notified and asked to indicate their interest in attending to the Monitoring Officer, who would then consider the position further with the Chair.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report be noted;
- 2) all Members of the Committee indicate their availability and/or willingness to attend the 2010 Annual Assembly to the Monitoring Officer; and
- 3) a further report providing clarification on First Tier Tribunal costs be brought to the next meeting.

Monitoring Officer

STC5 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS OF MEMBERS

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Resources on the local application of the systems for declarations of interests by Members in order to maintain the values of good governance and ethical behaviour.

Members were reminded that the first annual report on Declarations of Interest by Members was considered at the meeting on 3 June 2009. This highlighted the importance of integrity in local government and provided guidance on the definition of both personal and personal and prejudicial interests. The Register was updated in May each year and was held by the Principal Committee Services Officer. In addition, a register of gifts and other hospitality was maintained by Committee Services, when Members were required to declare any gifts or hospitality worth £25 or more received in connection with official duties as a Member. Both registers were regularly inspected by the Council's Monitoring Officer.

The Committee noted that all newly elected Members received advice on this requirement as part of the Council's Member Induction Programme.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

STC6 DRAFT ACTION LIST

The Committee's Action list was attached for information.

In considering the Action List, the Committee highlighted the importance of training and how the Committee could contribute to Members' awareness of the Standards Committee and its function. In relation to action number 2, it was noted that the Council had approved the increase in numbers of Independent Members from three to four.

The Chair invited all Members to put forward their ideas for any future training requirements.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

STC7 RECENT CASE SUMMARIES FROM STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND

The Committee received a report of the Strategic

Director, Resources which outlined recent decisions in cases where a breach of the Code of Conduct had been alleged in other authorities.

The Committee noted the contents of the case of a Parish Councillor suspended from office for a four month period, having been found in breach of several parts of the Members' Code of Conduct.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Dates for the remaining meetings in 2010/11 are as follows:

8 September 2010

10 November 2010

5 January 2011

23 February 2011

Meeting ended at 4.05 p.m.