

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Standards Committee Wednesday, 8 September 2010 Committee Room 1, Runcorn Town Hall

Present: Mr W Badrock (Chairman), Parish Councillor Mr B Allen, Mr A Luxton (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A Morris, Councillors Murray, Parker, Redhead, Swain and Wainwright

Apologies for Absence: Parish Councillor Canon D. Felix and R. Garner

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

STC8 MINUTES

Action

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2010, having been printed and circulated, were signed as a correct record.

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

- The power to award costs by the First Tier Tribunal if the Tribunal considered a party had acted unreasonably in bringing, defending or conducting proceedings;
- Support from Standards for England to Standards Committees and their availability to attend a future meeting;
- Cancellation of the Annual Assembly in the Autumn; and
- Take-up of the one to one training sessions offered at the previous meeting.

STC9 STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND ROUNDUP

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

On 28 May 2010, Standards for England issued a statement concerning the Government's Planned Decentralisation and Localism Bill (the Bill) and included a proposal to abolish the Standards Board regime. Although the proposals in the Bill had not been confirmed, Members were advised that the local Standards Framework remained pending further legislative change.

Since the Statement was issued, Monitoring Officers had been advised not to provide quarterly update reports.

On 24 June 2010, Standards for England had advised that a new "Compact Toolkit" had been launched which offered help and guidance in building up greater working relationships with parish and town councils. The toolkit had been jointly developed by Standards for England, the National Association of Local Councils and the Society of Local Council Clerks. The toolkit was designed for use by Standards Committees, Monitoring Officers, SLCC Branch Officers and County Association Officers.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

STC10 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 and discussed the contents of two cases from Hyndburn Borough Council and one for Wolverhampton City Council.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

STC11 DRAFT ACTION LIST

The Committee's Action List was attached for information.

In considering the Action List, the Committee highlighted the importance of training for all Elected Members and Parish Councillors on the current Code of Practice. In the absence of a new Code being issued in the foreseeable future given the recent change in Government, the Committee were keen that refresher training be organised. In addition they supported the idea of holding training for the Committee, utilising role play, at a future meeting.

The Monitoring Officer had considered the possibility of a Cheshire-wide training opportunity (to include the Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester and Warrington Authorities), and would raise this as an item at the next meeting of the Cheshire Secretaries' Group, and report the outcome to the next meeting of the Committee.

Monitoring Officer

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

STC12 BLOGGING TOPIC GUIDE

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Resources which advised Members of the online publication of a Blogging Topic Guide by Standards for England.

The Guide was published on the 18 August 2010 on the Standards for England website. The Guide pointed out that blogging had become an important and legitimate part of the operation of a democratic society and recognised that it was an efficient cost effective means of keeping in touch with people.

A copy of the Guide was attached to the report at Appendix 1, and it explained the positive role of blogging and provided information on how the Code of Conduct applied, giving examples of tribunal cases that had dealt with the issue.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 4.15 p.m.