

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Standards Committee on Wednesday, 10 September 2008 in Committee Room 1, Runcorn Town Hall

Present: Mr B. Badrock (Chairman), Crawford, T. Luxton, Balmer, Parker, Redhead, Wainwright and Wharton

Apologies for Absence: Mr R. Garner

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: L. Cairns and M. Reaney

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE COMMITTEE

STC4 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4th June 2008, having been printed and circulated, were signed as a correct record.

STC5 ACTION LIST

The Committee considered the Action List in detail and noted/agreed the following:

- Action 1 – The joint training with Warrington Borough Council had taken place on 18th June 2008. A number of Members could not attend this event and so the possibility of arranging a new date with a role play training exercise was being investigated. This would incorporate the new Independent Member who had recently been appointed. It was agreed that Members be canvassed for a training date after 13th November 2008.
- Action 3 – No information had been forthcoming from Wigan Council to date.
- Action 6 – It was confirmed that the cost of a training

Action

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day could be met from within existing resources and the Parish Councils would be included in this.

- Action 7 – The website had been updated to state that complaints must now be submitted to the Councils Standards Sub-Committee. In addition, if the Committee agreed the filter arrangements before it today, information in this respect would also be added to the website.

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- Action 9 – Training on the Code was now rolled out regularly and was well attended and this had negated the need for a DVD. It was agreed that the opportunity of including an article in “Inside Halton” be investigated to increase the profile of the Standards Committee. Information could be provided about protocols, should they be agreed by the Committee, together with links as to how these could be accessed with a timeframe for the review of requests. It was confirmed that this information would be ready following the next meeting of the Committee.

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- Action 16 – Two Sub-Committees to be chaired an Independent Member had now been established. Further information had been circulated with the agenda outlining a proposed protocol for dealing with complaints based on guidance issued by the Standards Board. The Committee considered the documents that had been circulated in detail and agreed the following:

- 1) **Draft Monitoring Officer Protocol** – Agreed with no changes.
- 2) **Terms of Reference of the Assessment Sub-Committee** – agreed subject to the following amendments – 1b(iv) add “or the allegation is in respect of another body of which the Councillor is a member” and in respect of 1c(iii) the words “of the Standards Board for England” be included after “Adjudication Panel”.
- 3) **Terms of Reference of the Review Sub-Committee** – agreed subject to additional wording to be added to paragraph 2, for the avoidance of doubt, stating that Members who sat on the Review Sub-Committee could not have already sat on the Assessment Sub-Committee.
- 4) **Draft Complaint/Assessment Criteria** – agreed

subject to the last paragraph under No. 1 being made impersonal, the penultimate paragraph under No. 2 being amended to read “the Sub-Committee will then consider whether, on the basis of the complaint and that additional information, there is a case to answer or there has been a possible breach of the Code of Conduct”.

- Action 17 – The Monitoring Officer had written to the Standards Board for England about the allocation of places on conferences and had requested a response. In the meantime, the Monitoring Officer and the Chairman would be attending the Annual Conference the following month.

STC6 APPOINTMENTS TO VACANCIES

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy providing an update on the current position in respect of the appointment to the vacant post of “Independent Member” and “Parish Council Representative”, which had been established in order that the Committee could fulfil its requirements in terms of the new filtering process.

It was advised that the vacancy for an Independent Member had been advertised in accordance with statutory requirements and Mr. Robert Garner had been subsequently appointed. Steps had also been taken to fill the Parish Council vacancy. Unfortunately, Officers had not been able to secure an appointment to date.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) Mr. Garner be welcomed as the new additional Independent Member of the Committee; and
- 2) the current position relating to the Parish Council vacancy be noted and an individual letter be sent to each Parish Councillor in the Borough to ask if they would be interested in filling the vacancy.

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STC7 STANDARDS BOARD INFORMATION ROUND-UP

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy bringing Members up to date with the latest news from the Standards Board.

A copy of Bulletin 39, released since the last meeting of the Committee, was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

In particular, Members' attention was brought to the following:

- the Standards Board would no longer publish summaries of completed investigations on their website. Instead, quarterly statistics about cases handled across the country would be produced. In addition, the Board intended to compile an annual report highlighting notable practice in local case handling. The Monitoring Officer reported that he had submitted the first quarterly response confirming that no complaints had been received in that period;
- new guidance had been published to support local authorities in the implementation of the local framework; and
- Dr. Robert Chilton had been appointed as the new Chair of the Standards Board for England with effect from 1st July 2008 for a three-year term.

In addition, two press releases had been circulated for information, providing details of an investigation in Cornwall that had resulted in the disqualification of two Members for a twelve-month period, and outlining the initial impact of the local filtering system on local authorities across the country.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report be noted; and
- 2) the press release relating to the investigation in Cornwall be circulated to all Members of the Council for information.

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Meeting ended at 4.40 p.m.