

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 29 OCTOBER 2007

PRESENT:- Mr Keith Carby (Chair), Mr Trevor Davies (Vice-Chair), Mr Mike Compton, Councillor Melanie Duff and Councillor Maurice Fanning.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Paul Morris.

9. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

10. Minutes

Resolved – (1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd July 2007, be confirmed and signed.

(2) That Mr Trevor Davies be thanked for presenting the Standards Committee's Annual Report to full Council on 27th September 2007.

11. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

12. Exempt Items - Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved - That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded during the discussion of the matters referred in Agenda Item 9 on the grounds that it would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information concerned (Minute 16 refers.)

13. Standards Board Training DVD - 'The Code Uncovered'

The Committee viewed the DVD 'The Code Uncovered' issued by the Standards Board for England as a training aid to highlight some of key changes within the new Code of Conduct, through a dramatised scenerio of a Planning Committee meeting,

Resolved – That the Monitoring Officer offer the use of the DVD as part of structured training sessions on the new Code of Conduct to Planning Committee Members, other Members, Officers and Parish Councillors.

14. Review of Council Codes and Protocols

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services, recommending that the Committee approve for consultation revised versions of the a) Monitoring Officer Protocol, b) Councillor Role Definitions, c) Guidance to Councillors on Dealings with the Media, d) Protocol of Member/Officer Relationships, and e) Members Planning Code of Good Practice, which had been amended to reflect the new Members Code of Conduct and the 'New Code of Good Governance in Local Government'.

In addition, the Committee received for consideration new Role Definitions for those roles which had responsibility allowances attached but no current role definitions; namely, the Standards Committee Chair and Independent Members, the Licensing Chair and Members, and Opposition Leaders.

Resolved – 1) That the revised Council Codes and Protocols be approved for consultation with Members, Officers and relevant stakeholders.

2) That the Monitoring Officer be authorised to carry out the necessary consultation and report back to the Committee at its next meeting in January 2008, to enable the revised Council Codes and Protocols to be adopted.

3) That the Monitoring Officer be authorised, in consultation with the Chair, to finalise the new Role Definitions for consultation, following receipt of any amendments from Standards Committee Members or post holders.

15. Ethical Framework Update

The Committee received a report from the Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) providing an update of various matters relating to the Ethical Framework in respect of:

- i) Standards Board – The Committee received the Standards Board Bulletin for September 2007 (Issue 35) and the Town and Parish Standard for September 2007 and noted key areas of interest for the work of the Standards Committee. In particular, the Committee discussed the statistics showing that 80% of Town and Parish Councils had not been the subject of a Code of Conduct complaint. This proportion was broadly reflected in Swindon, and was to be welcomed. It was agreed that having regard to the various training sessions for parish councils which had been carried out by the Monitoring Officer over recent months, it was appropriate for the Committee to seek an assurance from parish councils in the Swindon area that they were fully conversant with the requirements of the Code and were receiving the support needed from the Monitoring Officer and the Committee. The Committee noted the headline feedback on the local filter pilots of which Swindon had been one of 38 local Standards Committees involved, and that the Committee would be one of twenty authorities taking part in the forthcoming pilot on monitoring and audit arrangements.
- ii) Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire Independent Standards Committee Members' Forum – The Committee received the notes from the Forum held on 19th October and from the Co-ordinators Meeting held on 30th July. The Committee thanked Mr Trevor Davies for attending these meetings, and noted the discussions being held on potential implications of local filtering on local Standards Committees.
- iii) Annual Standards Board Conference – The Monitoring Officer reported back on the Conference held on 15th and 16th October 2007. It was noted that no indication had been given as to when the draft Regulations for the new local filter arrangements would be published, although the intention was for the arrangements to operate from April 2008.

- iv) Training and Development – The Monitoring Officer advised of a workshop for Members and Senior Officers which had been held on 29th September 2007, in conjunction with Learning and Development and the I&DeA, which identified a number of actions to support good member / officer relationships.
- v) Standards Committee Conference - The Committee supported the proposal for a conference on 'Ethical Standards in Partnership', to be held in the spring. The Monitoring Officer would contact Committee Members prior to the next meeting in regard to the arrangements.
- vi) Ethical Governance Healthcheck – The Monitoring Officer reported that he had recently acted as a Peer Reviewer on an I&DeA Ethical Governance Healthcheck of the London Borough of Lambeth. A number of learning points had arisen from the review which would be progressed, including the use of a local News Bulletin to advise the public of the work and role of the Standards Committee.

Resolved - 1) That the Ethical Framework Update be noted.

(2) That the Monitoring Officer provide to Mr Mike Compton a list of the Parish Councils where there had been only limited attendance at training events on the New Code of Conduct, for consideration by the Swindon Area Committee of the Wiltshire Association of Local Councils, on how they might provide further support and assistance.

(3) That the Monitoring Officer write to Parish Councils in the Swindon area seeking assurance that that they were fully conversant with the requirements of the Code and were receiving the support needed from the Monitoring Officer and the Committee.

(4) That the Monitoring Officer investigate use of an article in Swindon News or a similar publication to promote the work and role of the Standards Committee.

16. Ethical Framework Compliance Update

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) and the Head of Internal Audit, concerning the progress and outcome of various ethical framework compliance matters.

It was noted that two complaints relating to a Parish Council had been notified to the Standards Board for England since the last meeting, and the Standards Board had decided that neither complaint warranted further investigation. Two complaints relating to a Member breaching the Member / Officer protocol were being progressed by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair. The Committee also received an update on a whistleblowing case.

Resolved – (1) That the report in respect of ethical framework compliance issues be noted.

(2) That the success of whistleblowing complaint monitoring be noted and the Head of Internal Audit be requested to provide a schedule of the whistleblowing cases and outcomes dealt with during this year to the next meeting.