

ITEM 4

Time Commenced – 10.00am
Time Finished – 11.12am

STANDARDS COMMITTEE 3 SEPTEMBER 2010

Present: Mr P Sunderland (Chair)
Mr P McCrea, Mrs C McDowall, Mr P Purnell and
Councillor Wood

13/10 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Ms D Reid, Councillors Hird and Jackson.

14/10 Late Items Introduced by the Chair

There were no late items.

15/10 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

16/10 Minutes

The Chair stated that the 2010 Standards for England Conference had been cancelled and therefore the two Members selected to attend at the last meeting were no longer required.

Mr Purnell stated that both he and Mr McCrea had received their induction training on the ethical framework and that it was a very useful session.

Resolved:

- A. That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 May 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**
- B. To record the Committee's thanks to the Assistant Director of Democratic Services for the training session he provided to the new independent members of the Committee.**

17/10 Ethical Framework Update Training Session

The Head of Democratic Services informed the Committee that the annual refresher training day for Members had been booked for 11 November 2010 and expressed the hope that Members would attend. Mrs McDowall and Mr Purnell expressed a preference for a morning session and a time of 10.00am was agreed. The session

will run again in the evening, at 5.00pm, for Members with work commitments and The Chair and Mr McCrea will attend that session. Members asked that the session include reference to 'Standards in Public Life' and that they have an opportunity to speak about their role and stress the importance of the Framework.

Councillor Wood suggested that Members should be reminded of this training event to ensure it is well attended.

Resolved to note the training event on 11 November 2010 and request that officers remind councillors of the event at the earliest opportunity.

18/10 Member Development

The Committee received a report of the Head of Democratic Services on a Member Development policy which it is hoped will be a good step towards achieving the Member Development Charter. He stated that this policy would ensure that each Member had a four year development plan. Officers would then deliver the identified training needs.

Mr McCrea queried whether the Member Development Charter's accreditation body would remain in the future. The Head of Democratic Services stated that although the awarding body had changed in both name and nature it was still in existence.

Mrs McDowall stated that prospective candidates to the City Council should receive a copy of the Member Development Policy before they apply to know what is expected of them. She asked officers to ensure plain English were adhered to throughout the report.

Mr Purnell stated that the values section of the policy should be based on the Nolan Report's seven principles of public life in addition to any stock Council values.

Mr McCrea stated that in the internal governance section of the report more emphasis should be given to the ethical framework.

The Chair stated that more emphasis needed to be placed on representing not only their ward but also the city as a whole.

Resolved to recommend the Member Development Policy for approval by Council, subject to the amendments suggested by the Committee.

19/10 The Standards for England Annual Report 2009/10

Resolved to defer consideration of this item until Standards for England publish the report.

20/10 The Future of the Standards Framework

The Committee considered an oral report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services on the future of the Standards Framework. He informed the meeting that the Government's Decentralisation and Localism Bill would contain provisions to abolish altogether the current local government standards regime. Under these measures, Standards for England would be abolished and councils would no longer be required to have a councillor code of conduct or a Standards Committee. If Royal Assent was given to the bill from July to October 2011, then Standards for England would wind up at the end of 2011. He stated that the requirement for a Standards Committee might continue until the end of April 2012 to allow for a transition to any new proposed arrangements to be put in place. He informed the Committee that the Council would therefore need to retain its standards committee until the official date. He stated that in the future councillors would be required to register and declare pecuniary interests. Non declaration would constitute a criminal offence. The external body responsible for negotiating between the Government and local councils had extended an invite for the Council's views on the subject or to take part in the discussions.

Mrs McDowall suggested that since the Council had a Standards Committee before it was a statutory requirement then it should continue to do so after it was not a statutory requirement. The Chair stated that in his discussions with the political group leaders at least two of the groups had pledged their support to continue the Council's standards framework.

Mr Purnell stated that this move by the Government would reverse ten years of progress. He stated that the current standards framework had been a useful tool and had developed awareness amongst councillors of their responsibilities in public office. He said that he understood the Government's intention to remove excess bureaucracy; however, he still felt that councils should be able to police themselves in some format and this could be achieved by retaining the following duties in statute:

- A duty to adopt a code of conduct
- A duty to make arrangements to appoint a body to rule on breaches of this code
- A duty to appoint someone to service this body and make investigation as directed.

Councillor Wood stated that he did not think that the current costs of the standards framework prohibited its continuation. He added that rulings on the major cases uncovered details which would not have happened had the framework not been in place. The Director of Legal and Democratic Services stated that the major cost of the standards framework was the investigations. Investigations could be handled internally dependent on how politically charged the issue was. Mr McCrea stated that any future framework should be streamlined reducing the impact on resources, cost and the timescale each case takes to be heard. The Chair stated that if the responsibility for managing the framework were passed back to councils then all of the Committee's suggestions could be factored into the new procedures.

Resolved:

A. To note the oral report on the future of the standards framework; and

B. To request that the Chair of the Committee be allowed to attend the round table event in London scheduled to discuss the future of the standards framework.

21/10 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved to exclude the press and public during consideration of Minutes 45/09 under Regulation 8(6) of the Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008 and under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 7(C) of Schedule 12A of the Act and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

22/10 Summary of Progress with Member Complaints

The Committee considered a report setting out details of the progress and outcome of the Member complaint received so far in the 2010-2011 municipal year.

Resolved to note the report

Chair of the next ensuing meeting
at which these minutes were signed