

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE on WEDNESDAY 21 JANUARY 2009.

PRESENT:

Independent Members - Mr KR Shipman (Chairman), Mrs I McCord, and Mrs C O'Sullivan

Members of the Council - Mr E Clark and Mrs M White

Also in attendance

District Council Standards Committee Representatives:

Mr R Job - Salisbury
Mr T Frost - West Wilts
Mrs J Clarkson - Salisbury
Mr J Scragg - North Wilts

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Mr P McGuigan and Mr P Lefever.

The Chairman welcomed District Council Standards Committee representatives who attended the meeting.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Resolved:

To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2008.

3. Announcements from the Chairman

Mr Alan Savill

The Chairman reported that sadly, Mr Alan Savill, who had chaired Kennet District Council's Standards Committee since its inception had died recently.

The Chairman reported that he had written to Mr Savill's family to extend the Committee's condolences.

Recruitment of Members to the Standards Committee

The Chairman updated the Committee on arrangements in place to recruit new members to the Committee. It was noted that the Interview Panel had been appointed, details of which were presented and dates agreed for interviewing candidates for the positions of independent members and town and parish council representatives. The recommendations of the Panel would be presented to Council on 24 February 2009.

Code of Conduct

The Chairman reminded the Committee that it had previously responded to the consultation by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on proposed revisions to the Code of Conduct for Members.

The Chairman updated the Committee by explaining that the DCLG had advised that it intended to publish a summary of the consultation responses in March 2009 and that any changes to the Code would come into force in line with the local government elections in 2009. Officers had flagged up concerns to the DCLG over the timing of introducing the Code around the elections. The DCLG's response to these concerns was that it should be possible to have a lead in time for adoption as had been the case with the current Code.

Members' Induction Plan

The Chairman reminded the Committee that it had at its last meeting requested details of the Members' Induction Plan. The Chairman reassured the Committee that he had seen an initial draft of the Plan and could confirm that there was provision within the Plan to provide training to Members on the Code of Conduct for Members.

The Plan would be presented to the Implementation Executive for approval in February 2009 and could then be presented to this Committee in March for information.

4. **Members' Interests**

None.

5. **Public Participation**

None.

6. **Training**

The Chairman reported that officers were currently making arrangements for the training of members of the Standards Committee of Wiltshire Council.

The intention was to arrange appropriate training during March on dates to be agreed which would be circulated as soon as possible. The aim was to provide two sessions, one on the Code of Conduct for Members and one for specific standards committee training to cover issues such as the role and functions of the committee and the local assessment regime incorporating the role of the Assessment, Review and Hearing Sub-Committees and reinforce this with a case study or two.

Resolved:

That the arrangements for training be noted.

7. **Strengthening Links with Town and Parish Councils**

The question of whether or not the Council sponsored the Wiltshire Association of Local Councils was raised at the last meeting. The Corporate Standards Manager had given an undertaking to provide details of proposals to strengthen links with town and parish councils. Accordingly, the Corporate Standards Manager updated the Committee on these areas.

Area Boards were being developed by a team within Development Services in conjunction with Democratic Services. Area Boards by their very nature, would have close links with town and parish councils within their respective areas.

A Town and Parish Councils Projects Manager had been appointed within Development Services. This Manager was already working with the Wiltshire Association of Local Councils (WALC) and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and would act as a link between the town and parish councils and the Council. This would also assist the town and parish councils in having one definitive point of contact with the Council. Part of the Manager's role would be to raise awareness of the provisions of the Code of Conduct and other ethical governance issues and would approach WALC and NALC for guidance on the best way of delivering this.

The Ethical Standards Officers of the Council who will work to the Head of Governance would also play a part helping to raise awareness of the Code of Conduct and promote the work of this Committee to town and parish councils. This was highlighted as an area which members of the Committee could become involved in. Members commented that breaches of the Code mostly stemmed from Members' misunderstanding of it rather than a wilful act to breach it and that the Committee should be proactive to raise awareness of the Code wherever possible. Arranging training on the Code for clerks and chairmen of town and parish councils was seen as a way of focussing on the prevention of breaches of the Code.

Resolved:

That the position be noted.

8. **Constitution – Progress Report**

The Principal Democratic Services Officer presented a position statement which updated the Committee on the work being undertaken to prepare a constitution for Wiltshire Council and the timescales involved.

Mrs McCord as Chairman of the Focus Group on the Constitution referred to the work of the Group. The Group had last met on 16 January 2009 when it had considered the draft constitution together with comments received from Members.

The Group made a number of recommendations to the Implementation Executive including a recommendation that Council be asked to adopt the constitution. The Implementation Executive would be considering the recommendations at its meeting on 28 January 2009. The Focus Group would next meet on 4 February 2009 to pick up any points which emerge from the Implementation Executive as well as continuing its work to further develop the constitution.

Resolved:

That the position be noted.

9. **Communications**

The Corporate Standards Manager reported that the Council had complied with its statutory obligations to publicise its adoption of the Code of Conduct and details of the procedure concerning making complaints against Members.

A discussion ensued on how to publicise and promote the work of the Committee beyond its minimum statutory obligations. Members agreed that the emphasis should centre around being proactive in promoting good behaviour by Members and ensuring their full understanding of the Code rather than just being reactive to complaints.

A number of measures were discussed including members of the Committee along with Ethical Standards Officers of the Council engaging with the public on this issue through the Area Boards and the use of leaflets and bulletins.

Members were asked to contact the Corporate Standards Manager with any further suggestions. Members also agreed that this was an area that could be examined in further detail by the Committee through a Sub-Committee appointed for this purpose.

Resolved:

That the Standards Committee of Wiltshire Council be asked to consider appointing a Sub-Committee to progress work on communication having regard to the views expressed at this meeting.

10. **Bulletin No. 41**

Members noted Bulletin No. 41 from the Standards Board for England.

11. **Towards One Council**

Members' attention was drawn to a link to the Council's web site which provided access to agenda, reports and minutes of the Implementation Executive which was dealing with all matters concerning the transition to one Council for Wiltshire.

12. **The Committee's Work Plan**

The Committee was invited to review its work plan and identify items for inclusion in the agenda for its next meeting, which would be the last meeting of this Committee under Wiltshire County Council.

The following items were identified for consideration at the next meeting on 18 March 2009:

- Assurance Framework
- Code of Corporate Governance
- Annual Governance Statement
- Members' Induction Plan
- Handover from District Councils – outstanding complaints
- *Communications – update

* if possible given that the priorities would be to ensure the Committee is ready under Wiltshire Council, to provide training for Members and deal with any outstanding cases from the district councils.

Resolved:

That the Committee's work plan as outlined above for its meeting on 18 March 2009 be approved.

13. **Urgent Business**

None.

(Duration of meeting: 2.30pm – 3.50pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Yamina Rhouati, of Democratic & Members' Services, direct line (01225) 718024, e-mail yaminarhouati@wiltshire.gov.uk

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