

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 3 FEBRUARY 2010 AT COMMITTEE ROOM III, COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE.

Present:

Wiltshire Council Members

Cllr Nigel Carter, Cllr Ernie Clark, Cllr Peter Fuller and Cllr Julian Johnson

Town/Parish Council Co-opted Members

Mr W Bailey, Mr C McCallum, Mr PNeale, Mr R Oglesby JP, Mr J Scragg, Miss P Turner, Mr K Wallace and His Hon MacLaren Webster QC

Independent co-opted Members

Mrs Jane Bayley, Mr Philip Gill MBE JP, Mrs Isabel McCord (Chairman), Mr Ian McGill CBE, Mr Stuart Middleton and Mr Gerry Robson OBE

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors McLennan, Hewson, Mr Shipman and Mr Cronin.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 November were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Chairman's announcements

Leader's Award

The Chairman informed members of the committee that the Leader of the Council, Jane Scott, had received an OBE in the New Years Honours List. She suggested that congratulations on her commitment and achievement in delivering Wiltshire Council, and being justly rewarded with this honour be sent from the committee.

Meeting with the Leader and Chief Executive

The Chairman announced that she and Ian Gibbons had met with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive on 17 December. It had been very clear from the meeting that they were supportive of the Standards Committee and its

work and welcomed further meetings. The next meeting will be in February or March once the new Chief Executive is in post and thereafter meetings will be quarterly unless for a specific issue.

Constitution Focus Group Update

The elected member from the Scrutiny Committee has not yet been notified but once this is done the first meeting will be arranged. It is hoped that this will be convened shortly.

Guidance note on officer's code of conduct

It had not been possible to be completed in time for the meeting so it would be circulated to committee members by e-mail.

Agenda

The Chairman said that this was the first agenda to be produced on the Modern.Gov system and hoped that members would find the addition of page numbers a useful tool.

4. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest

5. **Public participation**

None

6. **Communications Sub-Committee Update**

Miss Turner gave an update on the progress made by the Communications sub-committee. She said that the committee had welcomed the Chair of the Training sub-committee to their last meeting and they had discussed the roles of both committees. The meeting had then concentrated on reviewing the leaflet on the work of the Standards Committee. It was almost complete and this would be circulated to all members of the committee for their comments prior to issue.

It was requested that the annual, anonymous digest of Code of Conduct cases mentioned in the action plan be themed so that the most common issues were highlighted.

The Chairman requested that the digest be added to the agenda for the next meeting for comments by the committee prior to publication. She said that all members would receive a copy of the digest and that it would be published on the Council's website.

7. **Training Sub-Committee Update**

Mr Robson said that the committee had looked at training for Town and Parish Councils and that Mr McCallum had volunteered to run a trial session at his own

parish council. He drew attention to the work plan which identified which areas of training the committee felt should be progressed.

8. **Communications and Training Sub-Committees**

The committee considered a report which proposed new arrangements for the discharge and oversight of the communications and training functions of the Standards Committee.

A debate ensued and it was agreed that the two committees should be disbanded and replaced by task and finish groups which would concentrate on specific issues; membership would be drawn from the Standards Committee.

The Chairman asked that the Chairmen of the sub-committees review their respective work plans to identify which issues needed to be agreed by the Standards Committee and to refer them to the Monitoring Officer for inclusion in the agenda for the next meeting.

It was recognised that there was a need to ensure continuity in the link between the Standards Committee and the Councillor Development Group and it was agreed that if Councillor Carter should cease to be a member of the Group then he should be replaced with a Standards Committee representative.

It was requested that a task and finish group be set up with immediate effect to look at training needs analysis, membership to be drawn from the current Training sub-committee and assistance from Human Resources would be sought.

Resolved

1. **To disband the existing Communications and Training Sub-Committees and replace them with “task and finish” groups. These task and finish groups would be constituted to carry out particular tasks identified by the Standards Committee as and when a need is identified.**
2. **Reports to the Standards Committee should contain a paragraph that considers whether the report contains issues giving rise to a training or communications need. If so, the Standards Committee would establish an ad hoc task and finish group to deliver the specific piece of work identified. The task and finish group would only exist until the project had been completed.**
3. **Membership of task and finish groups would be not be fixed. Members would be drawn from the Standards Committee, with officer support, as the need arises. Consideration would be given to the skills needed for each task, and to the availability of members. This arrangement would provide for greater flexibility, would enable the Standards Committee to capitalise on the very**

wide range of skills in its membership, and give all members of the Committee the opportunity to engage in project work.

4. **That continuity in the link between the Standards Committee and the Councillor Development Group be maintained. This link ensures that the training needs of councillors in relation to the Code of Conduct and other matters within the Standards Committee's remit are taken into account as part of the overall member development strategy, which is within the remit of the Member Development Group. Should Councillor Carter leave the Group it was agreed that there should always be Standards Committee representation on the Member Development Group, notwithstanding the fact that individual councillors will change.**
5. **To set up a task and finish group to look at training needs analysis; membership to be drawn from the current Training sub-committee.**

9. **Status Report on Complaints made under the Code of Conduct**

The committee considered the status report on complaints. Some concern was expressed at the length of time some of the cases had been open. The Monitoring Officer said that the Standards for England guidance on the length of time to progress a complaint to completion of the investigation was 6 months.

The Chairman requested that a report be brought to the next meeting of the committee detailing progress on complaints including any reasons for delays together with proposed timescales and the implications of adopting a 6 month timescale for completing the investigation. It was also requested that officers develop a 'traffic light' system in order to identify the progress of complaints against timescales more clearly.

Resolved

That a report detailing progress on complaints including any reasons for delays together with proposed timescales and the implications of adopting a 6 month timescale for completing the investigation be brought to the next meeting.

That officers develop a 'traffic light' system in order to identify the progress of complaints more clearly.

10. **Standards Committee Plan 2010-2014**

The committee considered a report which sought agreement on a plan setting out the committee's priorities, and actions to meet them, over the next four years. The plan had drawn from Standards for England guidance on what excellent Standards Committees should be doing and linked to the goals and aims of the Council.

The Chairman said that the plan would need to be reviewed to include items from the discontinued sub-committees work plans.

It was agreed that Mr McGill would work with the Monitoring Officer to develop a method for evaluating the performance of the committee in delivering its goals This would be brought back to a future meeting.

The plan should be brought to the committee on a regular basis for review.

Resolved

- 1. That the priorities and actions for 2010 - 14, as set out in the plan be approved subject to some modifications including evaluation of performance.**
- 2. That the forward work plan be amended accordingly.**

11. **Register of Members' Interests**

The committee considered a report setting out the statutory and practice requirements relating to the on-line publication of the register of members' interests. The report outlined the statutory provisions relating to the register of members' interests, and considerations relating to the on-line publication of that register on the Council's web-site.

Resolved

- 1. That the Standards Committee recommends to Council that members and co-opted members of Wiltshire Council may opt into the on-line publication of their entries in the statutory register of members' interests.**
- 2. That the on-line version of the register be redacted to remove copies of councillors' signatures.**

Mr W Bailey asked that his vote against the resolution be recorded.

12. **Annual Audit and Inspection Letter**

The committee considered the report which drew attention to KPMG's Annual Audit Letter and invited the committee to consider its response.

The Chairman informed members that the process would be handled differently next year and Standards Committee members would be invited to a joint briefing with the Audit Committee.

She also drew attention to the seminar for all Councillors included co-opted members on the Comprehensive Area Assessment and in particular the use of resources. This would be held at County Hall at 2pm on 17 February 2010.

Resolved

That the committee welcomes KPMG's report which clearly identifies issues and actions to be taken by the Council, noting that the actions due completion at the end of December 2009 had been done.

13. **Standards for England Bulletin No. 46**

The committee received Bulletin no. 46 from Standards for England. It was noted that the Annual Return 2010 which was mentioned on page 6 of the Bulletin would be brought to the committee prior to it being sent to Standards for England. Also the Governance Toolkit for Parish and Town Councils (Page 99) would be advertised in the Town and Parish Newsletter.

Resolved

That the committee notes Standards for England Bulletin no. 46

14. **Forward Plan**

The Committee received the Committee's Work Plan for 2010/11.

Resolved

That the workplan be received and that the following items be added for the March 2010 meeting:

- 1. Items from the Training and Communications sub-committee work plans.**
- 2. Cllr Laura Mayes, Portfolio holder for culture change to attend the meeting. Link in with Council's action plan for organisational culture.**
- 3. Programme of meetings and events for Standards Committee involvement.**
- 4. Annual, anonymous digest of Code of Conduct cases.**
- 5. Engagement with Area Boards**
- 6. Report on progress of complaints and adoption of local assessment timescales.**

15. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items

(Duration of meeting: 2.00 - 4.05 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Pam Denton, of Democratic & Members' Services, direct line 01225 718371, e-mail pam.denton@wiltshire.gov.uk

Press enquiries to Communications, direct line (01225) 713114/713115