

STANDARDS COMMUNICATIONS SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the STANDARDS COMMUNICATIONS SUB-COMMITTEE held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE on MONDAY 19 OCTOBER 2009.

PRESENT:

- Independent Members - Mrs I McCord
Mr I McGill
- Town/Parish Members - Miss P Turner (Chairman)
Mr B Bailey
- Officers - Marie Gondlach, Democratic Services Officer
Henry Powell, Senior Scrutiny Officer
Nina Wilton, Head of Governance
Roger Wiltshire, Ethical Governance Officer
Matthew Woolford, Media Relations Manager
- Others present - Mr G Robson OBE (Chairman of the Training
Sub-Committee)
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27. Apologies and Introductions

Apologies were received from Mrs J Bayley and Mr E Clark.

28. Members' Interests

None were received.

29. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2009.

It was agreed to correct a typo in the resolution under Minute 22 to read, "The Sub-Committee resolved not to discuss this item of business."

Subject to this amendment, the minutes were approved and signed as a correct record.

30. Roles of the Communications and Training Sub-Committees

This item followed concerns expressed at the Standards Committee's 11 December 2009 meeting regarding a possible overlap between the roles of the Communications and Training Sub-Committees.

Mr G Robson OBE, Chairman of the Training Sub-Committee, provided a summary of the Training Sub-Committee's progress in refining its terms of reference and setting its future work plan. Training Sub-Committee members had agreed that much of its work would involve evaluating trends in the type and origin of complaints received under the Code of Conduct, and designing and allocating training where it was required. Training Sub-Committee members had requested clarification of whether its remit included overseeing training for officers on the Officers' Code of Conduct. They had also noted that the Communications Sub-Committee's work plan included some items relating to training, and had therefore requested clarification of the Sub-Committee's respective roles in order to prevent duplication of work.

The Head of Governance reported that the Officers' Code of Conduct was to some extent fixed as amending it required consultation with trade unions.

Members agreed the following points:

- The lack of clarity between the Sub-Committees' roles was partly due to the Standards Committee being in its early stages and the Sub-Committees being established at different times.
- The two options available were to a) to combine the Sub-Committees into one, or b) to clarify their respective terms of reference, with the Communications Sub-Committee removing actions relating to training from its work plan. This decision was ultimately for the Standards Committee to take.
- Both Sub-Committees must justify their existence with specific actions completed within a set timescale. Bureaucracy should not prevent real progress.
- The functions of both Sub-Committees should be able to be performed by the Standards Committee itself and if it was unable to do so it may be too large and too bureaucratic. A more effective structure may comprise a smaller Standards Committee, meeting more often and establishing task and finish groups of 4-5 members for set tasks.

- Following consultation of the Constitution, the Standards Committee role was agreed to be oversight of the Code of Conduct for Members.

Resolved

The Head of Governance to draft a report to the Standards Committee summarising the views of the Communications and Training Sub-Committees with respect to their future composition, terms of reference and working arrangements.

31. Communications Action Plan

The Sub-Committee received updates on the actions within the re-designed Communications Action Plan, and made the following comments:

A. The work/actions of the Standards Committee and its Sub-Committees be included in the Residents' Newsletter

- The text for an article in the Residents' Magazine ('Your Wiltshire') could be taken from the draft leaflet circulated under Item 6 (see Action C below).
- This should be included in the March edition, the print deadline for which is 4 February.

C. Production of leaflet introducing the Wiltshire residents to the Standards Committee and its work

Members considered a draft leaflet circulated at the meeting. It was agreed that the leaflet should be distributed to council hubs, libraries, Citizens Advice Bureaus, GP surgeries and the Race Equality Council.

There was agreement that the leaflet achieved its aims but could be improved with the following amendments:

- 'Maintaining standards' should be replaced with 'Raising standards'.
- The '*How do I make a complaint?*' section of the leaflet should be slimmed down, but brought to the front of the leaflet to give it greater prominence.
- Due to the lack of clarity over the term 'ethical governance', 'overseeing ethical governance' should be replaced with 'promoting high standards'.

D. Make a recommendation to the Standards Committee regarding the poor structure of the Wiltshire Council website, and the difficulty in finding the page where the public can submit complaints

- Recruitment in the ITC department was in progress to improve the web skills the department had available.

H. Articles/updates as applicable in the town/parish newsletter

- An article on dispensations is currently in draft and, subject to checking from the Monitoring Officer, will be included in a future edition of the Town/Parish Council newsletter.

J. An annual, anonymous digest of Code of Conduct cases circulated to all town/parish councils

- This digest will cover April-to-April and be included on the website. A link to it will be included in the Town/Parish Council newsletter.
- Consideration of this digest should be added to the Standards Committee's work plan.

Q. Include a feature on the Code of Conduct for Officers in the staff magazine

- It was agreed this action be removed as it duplicates Action R.

S. Recommend training on the Code of Conduct for Officers

- The Head of Governance reported that she would be meeting with officers in Human Resources (HR) next week to discuss this.

T. Circulate copies of the Code of Conduct for Members leaflet to Community Area Managers

- This action had been completed but should be amended to include planning officers and customer care officers.

U. Invite Community Area Board managers to a Sub-Committee's meeting

- This action should be removed and the Training Sub-Committee asked to consider targeted training on the Code of Conduct of community area managers.
- As a key tenant of the new Wiltshire Council, it was agreed that Area Boards are an important audience for the Sub-Committee to

reach. An action should therefore be added to the Action Plan addressing this.

The Chairman noted that work done by officers since the previous meeting had contributed an enormous amount and requested that this be recorded in the minutes.

Resolved:

To note the progress made with respect to the Communications Action Plan and that the amendments detailed above be made.

32. Draft leaflet introducing the Standards Committee

This was discussed under Item 5 (Communications Action Plan (Action C)) above.

33. Communications Strategy – Evaluation of Success

A fourth draft of the framework for evaluating the Strategy's success was circulated.

The following points were agreed:

- Further development of the framework was dependent on the outcome of the review of the respective roles of the Communications and Training Sub-Committees.
- There may not be value to add by measuring the performance of the Communications Sub-Committee alone, rather, the performance of the Standards Committee as a whole should be measured.
- The framework circulated would provide a useful basis for doing so and any final framework should contain only 5 or 6 simple indicators.

Resolved:

To suspend work on evaluating the success of the Communications Strategy until future arrangements with respect to the Communications and Training Sub-Committees have been agreed by the Standards Committee.

34. Update for the 13 January 2010 meeting of the Standards Committee

The Chairman reported that she would give a verbal update on the work of Sub-Committee to the Standards Committee at its 13 January 2010 meeting.

Resolved

The Chairman would give a verbal update on the work of the Sub-Committee to the Standards Committee at its next meeting.

35. Date of Next Meeting

Members agreed that the next meeting of the Sub-Committee be scheduled for **2.30pm, 8 February 2010.**

The meeting closed at 4.00pm.

These minutes were prepared by Henry Powell, Senior Scrutiny Officer, who can be contacted on 01225 718052 or henry.powell@wiltshire.gov.uk