



Committee and date

Standards Committee

26 January 2011

Item No

Public

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD AT 4.00PM ON THURSDAY 1 JULY 2010 IN THE OSWESTRY ROOM, THE SHIREHALL, SHREWSBURY

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Present:

Unitary Councillors:

Mr M Bennett, Mrs P Dee, Mr R Evans, Dr J Jones and Mr V Hunt

Parish/Town Councillors:

Mrs B Carlyle, Professor P Collins, OBE, Mrs A Dugdale and Mrs R Griffiths

Independent Members:

Mrs J Clarke, Mr T Griffiths, Mr S McLaren, Mr W Maddocks, Mr P Moore, Mr G Parry, Mr M Salt and Mr J Till

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED

that Mrs J Clarke be elected Chairman of the Standards Committee for the ensuing year.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr C Mellings, Mrs E Francis and Mr R Bentley.

3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED

that Mr S McLaren be appointed Vice Chairman of the Standards Committee for the ensuing year.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Evans declared a personal interest in Code of Conduct complaint reference OBC PAC3 as a former Clerk to West Felton Parish Council.

5. MINUTES – 28 JANUARY AND 27 MAY 2010

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the ordinary and extraordinary meetings of the Standards Committee held on 28 January and 27 May 2010 respectively be approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

6. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS REPORT

The Organisational Development Manager updated the Committee on the progress made by the Member Development Group and the Member development activities since January 2010 including the West Midlands Leaders' Board Primary Level Member Development Charter Award, the 1:1 Member development reviews, the Member Development Programme, feedback, evaluation and impact of Member development activities and the Protocol for Member attendance at conferences.

In answer to concerns regarding Member attendance levels at Planning/Licensing training, the Organisational Development Manager stressed that the take up of training was being given due regard and Members were being individually contacted to both stress the importance of the training on offer and to explore the reasons for the, in some cases, limited take up. The Monitoring Officer added that Group Leaders would be contacted to encourage attendance at training sessions with Planning and Licensing Committee members being required to attend the necessary training in order to sit on those Committees. .

Referring to the feedback and evaluation of the training offered, the satisfaction percentages detailed in the report were noted and it was considered that a clear description, such as, 'excellent', 'good' etc would be a useful addition to the feedback provided.

RESOLVED

- i) that the information relating to Member development activities, be noted; and
- ii) that improved Member attendance on the five sessions identified as essential be encouraged; and
- iii) that Planning and Licensing Committee members be required to attend the necessary training in order to sit on those Committees.

7. ETHICAL GOVERNANCE SURVEY

The Committee noted the outcome of the Ethical Governance Survey that had been undertaken to assess the performance of the Council in promoting and ensuring high ethical standards.

The Monitoring Officer referred Members to the Action Plan detailed within the report and stated that briefings would be undertaken with senior Council staff to address any shortfalls in knowledge in this area. Members acknowledged the intent to publicise the Code of Conduct more widely within the county particularly as Parish/Town Councillors' ethical standards were also covered by the Code.

Answering a Member's concerns, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that training on ethical standards would be given to statutory co-optees on the Council's new Scrutiny Committees.

In noting the information, the Committee agreed the importance of monitoring progress made in accordance with the Action Plan and considered the merits of repeating the survey in some 18 months' time in order to assess the level of progress made in this area.

RESOLVED

- i) that the Ethical Governance Survey report, be accepted;
- ii) that the Action Plan, as detailed in paragraphs 24 – 26 of the report, be adopted and actioned;
- iii) that, in order to assess progress in this area, the Ethical Standards Survey be repeated in some 18 months' time and the results compared with those achieved in the Spring 2010 Survey; and
- iv) that progress made on the Action Plan and the comparative results of both Ethical Surveys be reported to a future meeting of the Standards Committee.

8. LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK

The Council's Solicitor introduced the report and stated the intention to run events throughout October rather than solely during a single week in order to reduce pressures on delivery and young people's voluntary time. Replying to a Committee member's concern, he stated that all Members would be asked and encouraged to get involved with the events being held and added that the events were also open to all Shropshire schools.

A Member commented on the need to encourage both young people and adults to vote and stated that the events of 'Local Democracy Week' sought to target Shropshire young people to develop an interest in local democracy. The Committee acknowledged the timetable for the week as encouraging and commendable and also recognised the benefit of informing Parish/Town Councils of these events.

RESOLVED

- i) that the information relating to the Council's involvement in Local Democracy Week in October 2010, be noted;
- ii) that the dates for the 'Local Democracy Week' event timetable, once finalised, be circulated to members of the Standards Committee and the events be promoted to Shropshire Parish/Town Councils.

9. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED

that in accordance with the provisions of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972 and Paragraph 10.2 of the Council's Access to Information Rules, the public and press be excluded during consideration of the following item/s.

10. REVIEW OF THE 'SPEAKING UP ABOUT WRONGDOING' [WHISTLE BLOWING] PROCESS 2009/10

The Committee noted the annual update on the Council's 'Speaking up about wrongdoing', Whistle Blowing procedure and remarked that there had been no subsequent increase in the number of cases given the increase in staff on the formation of Shropshire Council on 1 April 2009. Members suggested that the procedure should be widely promoted to all staff and suggested methods, such as, staff-wide email, printed information on staff payslips.

Referring to the information leaflet on Whistle Blowing, tabled at the meeting and included in the Minute book for this meeting, the general consensus was that the leaflet was too long and wordy and featured too many different telephone numbers; should the leaflet be redrafted a more concise script was

believed to be less confusing with one single contact telephone number being featured.

RESOLVED

that the 2009/10 annual update on the Council's Whistle Blowing Procedure, be noted.

The public were invited to return to the meeting.

11. TRAINING FOR PARISH/TOWN COUNCILS 2010

The Council's Solicitor updated the Committee on training offered as part of a rolling programme to Shropshire Parish/Town Councillors and Clerks during the Spring and Summer 2010.

Replying to concerns relating to new Parish/Town Councillors, he explained that all new Members were invited to attend training via an invitation sent to all the Parish/Town Clerks. He added that a training DVD was currently being prepared and that this would be sent out to all Shropshire Parish/Town Council Clerks for them to make available to their new Members. A Member suggested that the DVD be made available from local libraries county-wide.

A Member commented on the merits of introducing a link from the Council's website to the DVD and thereby limiting the distribution of the DVD to those Clerks who did not have internet access. The ability to send in on-line questions from the Council's website and the possibility of an on-line quiz/questionnaire were also suggested as methods of improving the training and advice available on standards related issues.

Further improvements to the current training regime were mooted, including the provision of an annual training session for Members to complement the existing rolling programme and the introduction of formal evaluation questionnaires at every training session.

RESOLVED

- i) that the information relating to training of Parish/Town Councillors 2010 be noted;
- ii) that the production of a training DVD for Parish/Town Councillors, be endorsed; and
- iii) that the suggested improvements to the training regime be investigated and implemented where possible e.g. on-line access to the DVD, on-line standards quiz/questionnaire, an annual training session to complement the existing rolling programme, the introduction of formal training evaluation questionnaires.

12. STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND ANNUAL ASSEMBLY 2010

The Solicitor commented that the cancellation of the Standards for England Annual Assembly 2010 reflected the scaling back of activity of this organisation.

RESOLVED

that the cancellation of the Standards for England Annual Assembly, due to have taken place on 18 and 19 October 2010, be noted.

13. COMPLAINTS ABOUT MEMBER CONDUCT

The Committee considered the report relating to complaints about Member conduct that had been dealt with by the Standards Assessment and Standards Review Sub-Committees between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010.

A Committee member requested that complaints received should not only be emailed to the Committee but that a summary of the complaints and the decisions also be reported formally to the next Standards Committee meeting.

The Committee Vice Chairman requested Decision Notices be sent to the Standards Committee as they were received rather than in a large batch. The Solicitor advised that it would be prudent to delay the despatch of copies of Decision Notices until the expiry of the 28 day period to request a review of the decision.

RESOLVED

- i) that the information relating to complaints about Member conduct, be noted;
- ii) that a summary of complaints, decisions and action taken be formally reported to future meetings of the Standards Committee; and
- iii) that despatch of any Decision Notices to Standards Committee members be delayed until the expiry of the 28 day period to request a review of the decision.

14. OTHER ACTION

Members noted that the Monitoring Officer had been directed by the Standards Assessment Sub-Committee to take 'other action' in relation to allegations that had been received regarding the conduct of a Bridgnorth Town Councillor. In accordance with the Sub-Committee's direction it was noted that training on the Code of Conduct had been provided to all Bridgnorth Town Councillors.

RESOLVED

that the report on action taken by the Monitoring Officer, be noted.

15. CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINT REF: SC 13/09

The Committee noted the findings of the First Tier Tribunal (Local Government Standards in England) into the alleged conduct of former Shropshire Councillor Paul Andrews.

RESOLVED

- i) that the report relating to Code of Conduct complaint reference SC 13/09, be noted; and
- ii) that the importance of the formal induction of the new Shropshire Councillor for this electoral division, be acknowledged.

16. CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINT REF: OBC PAC/3

The Committee noted the findings of the First Tier Tribunal (Local Government Standards in England) into the alleged conduct of Councillor Peter Brown of West Felton Parish Council.

A member of the Committee commended the Tribunal for recognising the Respondent's disabilities and making every effort to ensure that he could hear the proceedings sufficiently.

RESOLVED

that the report relating to Code of Conduct complaint reference OBC PAC3, be noted.

The meeting closed at 5.45 p.m.

CHAIRMAN

DATE