



Committee and date
Standards Committee

28 January 2010

Item No

3

Public

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD ON 8 JULY 2009

Responsible Officer Richard Thomas
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Present:

Independent Members:

Mrs J Buckley (Chairman), Mr T Griffiths, Mr S McLaren, Mr W Maddocks,
Mr P Moore, Mr M Salt and Mr J Till

Parish/Town Councillors:

Mrs B Carlyle, Professor P Collins OBE, Mrs E M Francis, Mrs R Griffiths and
Mr R P Bentley.

Unitary Councillors:

Mr M Bennett, Mr R A Evans, Mr V Hunt and Mr C J Mellings.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs P A Dee.

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 April 2009, as circulated, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. COMPLAINTS ABOUT MEMBER CONDUCT

Consideration was given to the Monitoring Officer's report, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes. Members noted that the information provided in the report related to complaints about member conduct which had been dealt with by the Assessment Sub-Committee on 29 April 2009 or the Review Sub-Committee on 29 April and 1 June 2009, respectively.

The Monitoring Officer, responding to members' questions about the production of statistics on the number of complaints received and action subsequently taken. She advised that relevant details would be recorded to monitor particular trends, with particular exceptions being reported periodically. Otherwise, she anticipated presenting an annual composite report on this subject.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

5. OTHER ACTION

Members considered the report of the Monitoring Officer, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes. She reported that where an Assessment Sub-Committee directed the Monitoring Officer to take other action, the subsequent outcome had to be reported to members.

Prior to the reorganisation of Local Government in Shropshire, both the Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council and Bridgnorth District Council had directed their respective Monitoring Officers to take other action in relation to allegations received. The Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council Assessment Sub-Committee had directed its Monitoring Officer to provide training on the Code of Conduct, with particular emphasis on personal and prejudicial interests, for all members of Astley Parish Council. This had taken place on 18 March 2009 and was very well received, with all members of the parish council and the Clerk in attendance.

In December 2008, the Bridgnorth District Council Assessment Sub-Committee had directed its Monitoring Officer to request that a member of Bridgnorth Town Council to familiarise himself with the Town Council's policies and procedures. The member had subsequently confirmed that this action had been taken.

In addition, the complainants had requested a review of the decision taken by the Bridgnorth District Council Assessment Sub-Committee in July 2008 that no further action was necessary in relation to another complaint regarding a member of Bridgnorth Town Council. The Review Sub-Committee had subsequently directed the Monitoring Officer to provide training on the Code of Conduct for all members of the Town Council. This had been provided on September 2008, when 10 of the 16 members had attended, along with their Clerk and subsequently confirmed that they had found the training useful.

A number of members raised concerns over the six members of Bridgnorth Town Council who had failed to attend and asked whether any further action could be taken. The Monitoring Officer advised that it was not possible to demand attendance or to impose further sanctions, other than writing a strongly worded letter to the Parish/Town Council concerned.

RESOLVED:

That the report and other action taken by the Monitoring Officers of both Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council and Bridgnorth District Council be noted.

6. TRAINING FOR PARISH/TOWN COUNCILS

Detailed consideration was given to the Monitoring Officer's report on this subject, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That further training on the Code of Conduct, particularly in relation to planning and contentious issues that cause significant difficulty and the local assessment of complaints, be offered to parish/town councils within Shropshire during the next nine months
- (b) That this training be aimed at the 93.16% of members who have not attended previously, and all parish clerks also be encouraged to attend.
- (c) That consideration be given to arranging training on a "cluster" basis in certain geographical areas and/or with those parish clerks responsible for more than one council, or by some other means which will attract better attendance.
- (d) That specific training be provided for parish/town councils identified as having endemic problems in respect of ethics and probity issues.
- (e) That any training provided be carried out in liaison with SALC.

7. STANDARDS COMMITTEE TRAINING

The Monitoring Officer presented her report on this subject, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes. She explained that although a number of members had experience of the local determination process from their membership of previous authorities, it was essential for everyone to be adequately trained in their new role if the Committee was to operate effectively and efficiently.

Members concurred with the need to standardise training and to concentrate attention on local determination hearings only when it became necessary to call a Hearing Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted and that member training sessions in relation to ethics and standards be held on both 18 and 29 September 2009.

8. STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2009/10

RESOLVED:

That the Standards Committee Work Plan for 2009/10 be approved.

9. ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

The Monitoring Officer reported that the Council had reserved five places for the next Annual Assembly of Standards Committees, which was due to be held in Birmingham on 12-13 October 2009. She suggested that in addition to herself and one of the legal team, one Independent, one Unitary and one Parish Council member should also attend.

RESOLVED:

That the Council's representatives at the 2009 Annual Assembly of Standards Committees be as follows:

- Monitoring Officer and Solicitor
- 1 x Independent member (Chair/Vice-Chair)
- 1 x Unitary Council member
- 1 x Parish Council member

10. MEMBERSHIP OF THE ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES IN ENGLAND

RESOLVED:

That, the Council agrees to fund the cost of membership for two independent members of the Committee, who shall arrange for the information received to be shared amongst the under membership.

11. DRAFT PAMPHLET – SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Detailed consideration was given to the draft pamphlet on standards in Local Government, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes.

Members were requested to forward any comments they may have on the content within the next seven days.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to any amendments which may be received, the document be approved.

CHAIRMAN

DATED