

**MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**  
**Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2007 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: John Mann (Chair, Independent Member), Rochelle Gelman (Vice-Chair, Independent Member) and Councillors Colwill, Leaman and Powney.

There were no apologies for absence.

**1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

None.

**2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2007 be approved as an accurate record.

**3. Matters Arising**

*Members' Attendance Figures*

Comment was made that inclusion in the figures of all scheduled meetings for the year, rather than just those meetings that had taken place, impacted negatively upon the attendance figures overall. Members discussed arrangements for ensuring alternates attended in place of members who had given apologies for a meeting and it was noted that the group whips regularly oversaw these arrangements.

*Networking Event*

The Chair reminded members that the annual Standards Networking event was planned for 21<sup>st</sup> March and that programmes for the event had now been issued. It had recently also been proposed that the agenda for the event include the Model Code of Conduct and the Local Government Bill in order to deal with the latest proposals.

**4. Proposed Changes to the Model Code of Conduct**

The Borough Solicitor introduced the report, which included a summary of the main features of the government's consultation on proposed changes to the Model Code of Conduct. Members heard that consultation was also underway regarding the wider ethical standards regime, which would necessitate changes to the primary legislation and which had been included in the Health Bill, published December 2006. The Borough Solicitor advised that the Committee would be presented with the agreed Code of Conduct once it became available, following the conclusion of the consultation period.

There was discussion regarding proposed changes to the disclosure of confidential information requirement (paragraph 3.8) and some members expressed concern that the wording in the current document could present difficulties to members when considering whether disclosure would be in the

public interest. The Borough Solicitor explained that members would be urged to take advice prior to any such disclosure and that the Standards Board for England would be issuing further guidance on this issue. Members also voiced the opinion that the definition of 'bullying' (paragraph 3.7) required further clarification. The Committee debated the requirement that any gift above the value of £25 be declared by the relevant member at every public meeting attended for five years following receipt of the gift, and it was agreed that this requirement was felt to be excessive. The Borough Solicitor advised in response to questions that the value of £25 was statutory and set at a national level.

The Committee resolved that the following comments be submitted by the Borough Solicitor, on behalf of the Committee, as part of the consultation process.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (i) that the Consultation on Amendments to the Model Code of Conduct for Local Authority Members be noted;
- (ii) that the definition of the term 'bullying' be given further consideration;
- (iii) that the length of time during which a member be required to declare receipt of a gift worth £25 or more (five years) be re-examined;
- (iv) that the provisions dealing with the disclosure of confidential information by members be considered for further clarification.

**5. Annual Work Programme 2007/08**

The Committee received a report from the Borough Solicitor setting out the Work Programme for the municipal year 2007-2008, which included the introduction of an annual review of members' expenses and the first annual review of the Licensing Code of Practice. There would be a report on members' allowances once agreement on this issue had been reached at the Constitutional Working Group (CWG). The Committee also recommended, as proposed by the Borough Solicitor, that a further report on the Model Code of Conduct for Local Authority Members be returned once the Code had been formally adopted. The Chair then invited all members and the Borough Solicitor to consider ways in which the Committee might add a pro-active element to its future work programme.

The prospective dates for the meetings for the municipal year 2007-2008 were circulated for information, although members were advised that these dates remained subject to change until they were agreed at the meeting of the full Council on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2007.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (i) that the Annual Work Programme be agreed;

- (ii) that a report on the new Code of Conduct for Local Authority Members be added to the Work Programme as discussed.

**6. Date of the Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was scheduled to be agreed at the Annual Meeting in May 2007.

**7. Any other business**

The Chair informed those present that the Standards Board for England had organised a training event in London scheduled for 28<sup>th</sup> June 2007 and invited all those wishing to attend to apply early as only four places were available.

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm

J MANN  
Chair

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