

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 11th January 2005 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: John Mann (Chair, Independent Member) and Councillors Hughes and Nerva.

Apologies for absence were received from Nav Mandair (Independent Member) and Councillor R Colwill.

1. Declarations of Interest

None

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 19th October 2004

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 19th October 2004 be approved as a true and accurate record.

3. General Principles in Code of Conduct

The Committee received a report providing clarification on an issue raised at standards training for Members on 10th November 2004 regarding the 10 General Principles within the Brent Code of Conduct

The Monitoring Officer suggested a change to the wording of the recommendation contained in the report to further clarify the wording of the section on the 10 General Principles.

The Monitoring Officer stated that the recommended amendment to the Code would be reported to Council in due course when other suggested changes to the Constitution were ready to be put forward.

RESOLVED:-

that the report be referred to Full Council with a recommendation that for the sake of clarity the wording of clause 18 of the Brent Members Code of Conduct be amended to read:-

“18. ‘Members are reminded of the 10 General Principles of Conduct (as set out below) which are to govern the conduct of Members when acting in an official capacity or when acting in any way which is connected to or relates to the Council. In addition a member’s conduct must be governed by principles 2 and 8 at all times.’

4. Review of the Register of Members’ Interests and the Register of Gifts and Hospitality

The Committee received a report setting out the findings of a recent audit of the Register of Members' Interests and the Register of Gifts and Hospitality. The audit was undertaken as part of the 2004-05 internal audit plan. The final version of the report from the auditors was tabled. The report identified a number of non-compliances with the rules on registering interests and possibly some failures to register gifts and hospitality. The report also recommended an action plan to rectify non-compliances and improve the situation in the future.

The Monitoring Officer explained that there was little difference between the draft report and the final tabled version. Whilst accepting most of the recommendations contained in the Action Plan she emphasised her reasons for not agreeing that the Democratic Services Manager should be responsible for checking the entries made by Members. She stated that the responsibility rested with Members to ensure they declared all their relevant interests.

The Monitoring Officer reported that the Director of Finance supported No 12 of the action plan concerning changing the guidance on declaring related party transactions. This is an annual return and an external audit requirement. The current position is that any member who acts as a director or trustee in a personal capacity in a voluntary organisation and the organisation receives a Council grant should declare details of their personal involvement. The Committee felt that in declaring related party transactions, Members should list their membership of all voluntary organisations which apply for grants from the Council as well as those which receive grants from the Council. However, it was acknowledged that Members would not always know if a voluntary organisation received or had applied for a grant from the Council. The Monitoring Officer agreed to consider this issue.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the findings of the audit as set out in the final version of the audit report and the action plan be noted;
- (ii) that in respect of actions 2 and 13 in the action plan the Democratic Services Manager should check only that all boxes have been completed as it would not be possible for him to say whether the information provided was accurate or whether there are any omissions;
- (iii) that in respect of action 15 the Democratic Services Manager will ask Members to check that their entries in the register are correct and will make any amendments notified to him prior to placing the register on line;

- (iv) that all other recommendations in the Audit Report be agreed and the Borough Solicitor requested to undertake those agreed actions by the stated deadline.

5. Member Development Programme

The Committee had before them a report detailing feedback on the Member Development Programme. The contents of the report had been circulated to all Members of the Council in October 2004.

Adam Pokun, Mayor's Office and Member Development Manager, was present to introduce the report.

The point was made about the importance of training and development for Members given the significant role that they performed. It was suggested that the emphasis should be on a learning experience rather than training. Some events had been undermined by outside speakers not having any knowledge of the history of Brent. A view was expressed that much of the training provided was not relevant to the majority of Members because they had no decision-making powers under the new Executive arrangements. Some Opposition Councillors performed a predominantly community based role and as such needed administrative resources to support them rather than training opportunities. In response it was suggested that the range of the training programme covered topics that any large organisation might cover such as developing IT skills and that this meant all Councillors could benefit from some aspects of the programme. The Committee acknowledged that the programme should not concentrate on providing for Executive Members but meet the broader needs of Councillors. It was suggested that a future programme might incorporate opportunities for bringing together people from across a range of public bodies to encourage joint partnership working. It was also pointed out that a training programme for 2006 would be dependent on the make up and experience of Members of the Council following the local elections.

The Chair thanked Adam Pokun for a well written report and asked that he consider the comments made by the Committee. He congratulated the Council on developing such a wide ranging training programme.

RESOLVED:-

that the report be noted.

6. Verbal Update from the Monitoring Officer

The Monitoring Officer reported that the regulations governing local investigation had been published in November 2004 which meant that Ethical Standards Officers could now refer to Monitoring Officers cases

for investigation and in turn the findings of Ethical Standards Officers and Monitoring Officers could be referred to Standards Committees for decision. This Committee's guidance on carrying out investigations would be amended to reflect this and brought before a future meeting of the Committee for approval.

It was also reported for information only that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had released a draft code of conduct for officers which was presently out for consultation. The results of the consultation were due to be posted on the ODPM's website in February. In the meantime consideration would be given to how the draft code could be adapted to give it a Brent dimension. It was explained however that this would not be reported back to the Standards Committee because it was about officer conduct not Members.

The Committee was reminded of the networking event taking place on 9th February. Invitations had been issued and it had been possible to obtain the services of the Chair of the Standards Board, David Laverick as guest speaker. The Monitoring Officer outlined the programme for the event and stressed the importance of Brent Members attending.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 8th March 2005.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

JOHN MANN
Chair

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