

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 6th April 2005 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: John Mann (Chair, Independent Member) Nav Mandair (Vice Chair, Independent Member) and Councillor Nerva.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hughes and Kansagra.

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Deputations

None.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 8th March 2005

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 8th March 2005 be approved as a true and accurate record.

4. Procedure for Local Determinations

Members exchanged views on the procedure for local determinations used for the hearing that took place on 8th March. It was felt that the procedure had worked well and the early receipt of information and guidance was welcomed. The Committee discussed the issue of members having representatives at hearings, legally qualified or otherwise. It was agreed that a flexible approach be adopted at this stage.

5. Report Back from the Monitoring Officer

The Monitoring Officer advised that the next Standards Committee Networking Event was planned for February 2006 the precise date and programme to be advised. The guidance on Related Party Transactions had been amended in line with the Committee's recommendations and would soon be followed by a Monitoring Officer Advice Note.

6. Standards Board for England Consultation on Code of Conduct

The Standards Board for England had published a consultation paper on the review of the Code of Conduct for Members. An introduction to the review and the questions posed had been circulated to all Standards Committee members as well as group offices, party whips, party leaders and the Chief Executive.

The Committee considered each of the questions posed in turn. On the question of whether the ten general principles should be incorporated into the preamble to the Code of Conduct it was agreed that it should. Brent has already done this. It was felt however that no further principles should be included in the Code at this stage. Regarding behavioural issues it was felt that the Code was sufficiently broad to encompass bullying but that perhaps it could be cited with others as examples of unacceptable behaviour. Members discussed the public interest defence for members who disclose confidential information, referring to the Westminster Dimoldenberg case due to be heard by the Adjudication Panel. It was agreed that further work was needed on the implications of such a change.

On registration and declaration issues, members felt that the guidance on 'dual hatted' members was confusing and needed to be improved, and that the new proposed term, 'public service interest' could be more clearly defined. The Committee agreed that members with a prejudicial interest in a matter should be allowed to address the meeting before withdrawing and those with public service interests permitted to contribute to the debate before withdrawing from the vote.

On the questions relating to gifts and hospitality it was noted that under the Brent Code the register of gifts and hospitality was already publicly available and agreed that gifts declined should also be declared. £25 was agreed as an appropriate threshold for the declaration.

RESOLVED:-

that the report be noted and that comments as outlined above and any others the Monitoring Officer may wish to make be submitted to the Standards Board for England.

7. Twinning with South Dublin County Council

The Committee received a report concerning a proposed protocol for twinning visits. The Committee agreed on the need for a greater connection between twinning aspirations and visits, noting the possibility of EU support funding being available and the need for a clear protocol for the visits to be in place in the near future.

RESOLVED:-

the draft protocol be noted and another draft be submitted for further consideration in due course.

8. **Lay Justices**

The provisions of the Courts Act 2003 which provide for the disqualification of lay justices who are members of local authorities from dealing with a case involving the same authority come into force on 1st April 2005. It was agreed that there was a need to raise awareness of the legislation among elected members and co-opted members.

RESOLVED:-

that the report be noted.

9. **Chair's Report Back from Hammersmith and Fulham Standards Committee Meeting**

The Committee received a report back from John Mann and Nav Mandair on their visit to Hammersmith and Fulham Standards Committee meeting on 15th March. There had been a long discussion on dispensations and it was agreed that this issue be added to the Brent work programme. At the Hammersmith and Fulham meeting there had also been a lively discussion of an Audit Commission review of the Council's ethical framework. John Mann thought the Audit Commission team might be working their way round the London boroughs and Brent might expect a visitation.

Members were pleased to note that for Brent good reports had been received from PwC in the Audit letter, Corporate Governance and the Special Investigations Team. It was agreed that a further visits to one or two other neighbouring boroughs would be valuable.

10. **Work Programme**

The work programme for the Standards Committee of the London Borough of Brent 2005/2006 was before Members for discussion.

It was noted that a Monitoring Officer Advice Note on taking up training and seeking advice had been drafted again drawing attention to members' responsibility for their training and development.

RESOLVED:-

that the proposed work programme for 2005/06 be agreed subject to the inclusion of a report on the granting of dispensations by this Committee.

11. **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting of the Standards Committee would be agreed at the Council's Annual Meeting in May 2005.

12. **Any Other Business**

None.

13. **Vote of Thanks**

The Chair thanked members for their contributions throughout the year and officers for their support. Members in turn thanked the Chair for his work.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm

JOHN MANN
Chair

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