

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 7th June 2006 at 7.00 pm

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

1. Chair's Welcome to Members

The Chair welcomed the Vice Chair to her first meeting and introduced and welcomed members to their first meeting following the local elections.

2. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED:-

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 13th February 2006 be approved as an accurate record.

4. Matters Arising

Twining

The Borough Solicitor agreed to submit a brief report to the next meeting on Twining including the issue of resources and the protocol. She also advised that it had not been possible to date to discuss the proposed protocol with South Dublin.

5. Monitoring Officer's Annual Conduct Letter

The Borough Solicitor introduced the Annual Conduct Letter (Advice Note 20) which had been circulated to members following the elections. The aim was to raise awareness and remind members of key issues regarding conduct and probity. These include, for example, the Code of Conduct, completing declarations of interest, registering gifts and hospitality etc.

In discussion, the Borough Solicitor confirmed that whistle-blowing obligations were still in place and explained the procedure for declaring personal and prejudicial interests and for granting exemptions. She explained that a review of the National Code of Conduct was in progress and that currently there were proposals to refer cases direct to the Standards Committee for consideration.

The Borough Solicitor advised that representation on Outside Bodies was a contentious issue at present and she would be issuing a further briefing note on participation. It was noted that changes were planned to the Code that would revise the current restrictions on members' rights to lobby on behalf of their residents although the detail of the new guidelines was not yet available.

The Committee thanked the Borough Solicitor for the report.

RESOLVED:

That the Monitoring Officer's Annual Conduct letter be noted.

6. The Granting of Dispensations by the Standards Committee

Graham Beever introduced the report on behalf of the Borough Solicitor. It had been prepared following the Chair's and former Vice Chair's visit to the Hammersmith & Fulham Standards Committee and presented an overview of the Standards Committee's powers. He pointed out the circumstances in which consideration would be given to granting a dispensation and the exemptions that apply. The Borough Solicitor added that often dispensations were granted when the member concerned had an indirect involvement and that she would advise against granting dispensations where members had a direct interest in a matter.

It was recognised that the Standards Committee would have to convene at extremely short notice should there be a need to consider an application and this would be very difficult unless members seeking dispensations anticipated their requirements well in advance of the affected meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

7. Standards Committee Procedures (Guide to Hearings)

The Committee had before them a summary of the procedure to be followed at hearings convened to consider allegations of misconduct and the Borough Solicitor outlined the procedures. The Borough Solicitor pointed out that in the event of a hearing another person would be appointed either to carry out the investigatory role or to advise the Committee – as Monitoring Officer she would not do both as this would give rise to a clear conflict of interest. Members noted that it was the intention to change the order in which *closing remarks* are to be heard so as to accord with the rules of natural justice. The Chair remarked that an A4 summary of proceedings had been produced which he had found most helpful.

It was also agreed to delete the word 'partial' from the final sanction listed at para 10.1 (f). Additionally, it was suggested that para 8 (a) be amended to make it clear that the Chair would not necessarily make a recommendation unless appropriate.

8. Work Programme

The Committee agree the following work programme for 2006/7 and agreed to add Twinning to the agenda for the next meeting:

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| 1. | Standards Committee procedures | 7 June 2006 |
| 2. | Annual Conduct Letter by Monitoring Officer | |
| 3. | Work Programme 2006-07 | |
| 4. | Guidance on the granting of dispensations by the Standards Committee | |
| 5. | Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer | 11 October 2006 |
| 6. | Annual Review of Register of Gifts and Hospitality | |
| 7. | Annual Review of Members' Interests | |
| 8. | Guidance on membership of outside bodies | |
| 9. | Twinning update | |
| 10. | Annual Review of the Member Development Programme | 17 January 2007 |
| 11. | Annual Standards Board Statistics | |
| 12. | Annual Review of the Planning and Licensing Codes of Practice | |
| 13. | Networking Event | 13 March 2007 |

9. **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on 11th October.

10. **Any other urgent business**

Standards Board Information

The Committee noted that regular Standards Board bulletins were available on the Standards Board website, and that it was possible to subscribe via email. There was also a pamphlet available providing an overview of the complaints process, a hard copy of which was distributed to members along with a copy of the latest Bulletin.

Standards Board Conference

The Chair advised members that there was an Annual Standards Board Conference. However in the past the Committee had taken the view that it was preferable for monies available for conference fees to be spent on local training, including the regular networking events.

The meeting ended at 8.55 pm

J MANN
Chair

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