

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 4th July 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 13th March 2007 be approved as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

London Networking Event

The Chair reported back on this event, held on 21st March. He advised that it had been well attended, with productive and informative discussion on both the new Model Code of Conduct and the Local Government Bill.

4. Presentation – new Brent Members’ Code of Conduct

The Chair introduced the speaker, Richard Lester (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy - CIPFA), who gave a presentation which examined in close detail the Government’s new Model Code of Conduct which came into effect on 3rd May 2007 and which is required to be adopted by the Council by 1st October 2007. Richard Lester spoke of the role the Code of Conduct played in maintaining public trust in local institutions and outlined changes to specific areas of the code. There were changes to the rules which governed private conduct to allow regulation of members’ behaviour even whilst not necessarily in the performance of their duties. It was noted however that this aspect of the new code would not be enforced until new legislation was introduced. Further amendments to the Code included the removal of the duty on members to report fellow members to the Standards Board, new rules which governed the disclosure of confidential information, anti-bullying measures and a new provision to allow non-disclosure of sensitive information (such as a members’ home address) if at risk of violence or intimidation.

There was discussion regarding the new requirement to include in the register of interests any gifts or hospitality worth £25 or more and to treat the giver of the gift or hospitality as a person with whom the member was associated for the purposes of the rules regarding personal and prejudicial interest.

Members were also advised that changes had been made in the areas of personal and prejudicial interests, with amendments governing the rules concerning speaking at a meeting at which the member had a personal interest.

Members of the Committee were then given the opportunity to consider a number of case studies prepared with a view to applying the new Code.

The Chair concluded this item and thanked Richard Lester on behalf of the Committee for a practical and informative presentation.

5. Report from the Borough Solicitor

The Borough Solicitor introduced a report on the new draft model code of conduct for Brent members recommended by officers following the introduction of the Government's new model code of conduct. The Borough Solicitor advised the Committee that further advice notes containing additional guidance would be made available to members and that training would also be provided at group meetings. In response to questions, the Borough Solicitor confirmed that the provisions of the model code were required to be adopted by all authorities, although there was some scope for local amendments.

The Committee thanked the Borough Solicitor for the report.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that it be noted that the provisions of the new Code that will apply to a members' private life will not be enforced until the Local Government and Public Involvement Health Act comes into force;
- (ii) that the Committee recommends to the full Council that the new Code be adopted;
- (iii) that it be noted that all members must register their personal interests as defined by the new Code within 28 days of the Council adopting the new Code;
- (iv) that it be agreed that all members be required to provide a new written undertaking to observe the new Brent Members' Code of Conduct following its adoption by the Council.

6. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Standards Committee will take place on Monday, 31st October 2007.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm.

J MANN
Chair

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