

**MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**  
**Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2008 at 7.00 pm**

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

Apologies for absence for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Colwill and Sneddon.

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

None.

**2. Deputations**

None.

**3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2008 be approved as an accurate record.

**4. Matters Arising**

None.

**5. Review of Member Development Programme – May 2006 to April 2008**

The Mayor's Office and Member Development Manager, Adam Pokun, presented a report which reviewed the activity of the Member Development Programme since the local elections which had been held in May 2006. The report outlined the background to the Member Development Programme, action and achievements since 2006, restrictions on the programme and opportunities for the future.

Members discussed the different training options included in the programme and enquired into the I.T. related training options in particular. Adam Pokun informed members that preparation work on an I.T. training session was underway and that all members would be kept informed of future developments and further additional sessions. The opinion was expressed that firm political leadership on member development was needed from all groups to guarantee regular member attendance and to ensure that participation reached target levels.

RESOLVED:-

that the Committee note this report.

**6. Annual Work Programme 2008-2009**

The Committee received a report from the Borough Solicitor which set out the work of the Standards Committee over the municipal year 2006-2007, and which also

contained a proposed work programme for the Committee for the upcoming municipal year 2008-2009.

There was some discussion regarding the order of the work programme, and it was noticed that the review of the Licensing Code of Practice and the review of the Planning Code of Practice were not scheduled until the third quarter of the municipal year. The Borough Solicitor noted that these issues remained subject to external timescales and had been scheduled for members' consideration accordingly. The Borough Solicitor also explained that the work programme needed flexibility so that urgent matters could be added to the programme when they arose.

RESOLVED:-

that members agree the proposed work programme for 2008-2009.

## 7. **Standards Board for England Statistics**

The Committee received a report which contained some of the latest statistics provided by the Standards Board for England on the amount of complaints received by the Standards Board, the amount of matters which had been investigated and the decisions made.

Members referred to the appendix to the report and discussed the various types of allegations referred for investigation. The Committee noted that 27% of allegations were listed as 'other' and enquired how the nature of such allegations might be defined. The Borough Solicitor advised that the categories which defined the nature of the allegations were specific categories which had been provided by the Code of Conduct; any allegations which fell outside these categories were therefore listed as 'other'. Comment was made that there were comparatively fewer complaints for London boroughs as opposed to other authorities, although it was also noted that under the new legislation all initial complaints would require a sub-committee hearing.

RESOLVED:-

that the Committee note this report.

## 8. **Composition of the Standards Committee**

The Borough Solicitor presented the Committee with a report which discussed the need to change the structure of the Standards Committee as a result of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The report recommended that the Committee adopt a new structure which included the creation of two sub-committees and the appointment of alternates to both the main Committee and the sub-committees.

In discussion, the Borough Solicitor explained that appointment of a third independent member was not viewed as necessary at this stage, but that it may become necessary in the future to appoint an additional independent member. Members' approval was sought to allow the Council to amend the Constitution if this became necessary. It was noted that there would be a training need if an additional independent member were to be appointed, and in agreement the Borough Solicitor

referred to the preparations to hold a member development session for all Committee members, including any alternate members appointed. It was recognised that the appointment of alternates to the Committee was a practical solution to the issue of quorum in the case of the smaller sub-committees. The independent members of the Committee both expressed some concern however that the structure relied on them both being available at short notice for sub-committee meetings.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) that the Committee recommends to the Council the creation of two sub-committees of the Standards Committee made up of one member from each political group and chaired by an Independent Member. The two sub-committees will be:
  - a) the Initial Assessment sub-committee
  - b) the Review sub-committee;
- (ii) that the Committee recommend to the Council to amend the Constitution so that one further independent member may be appointed to the Committee;
- (iii) that the Committee recommend to the Council to amend the Constitution so that alternates can be appointed to the Standards Committee;
- (iv) that the Committee recommend to the Council to appoint first and second alternates when it appoints members to the Standards Committee at the Council's annual meeting in May;
- (v) that the Committee recommend to the Council an increase in the allowance payable to an Independent Member from £207 per annum to £400 per annum and a per-meeting allowance for Independent Members of £100 per sub-committee meeting.

**9. Local Investigations Procedures**

The Committee received a report from the Borough Solicitor which provided members with a copy of the Council's Procedure for Local Investigations of Allegations of Misconduct Against Members of the Council. Members queried the provision which allowed the Monitoring Officer to withhold information relating to a complaint from the member who was the subject of the complaint. The Borough Solicitor explained that in some circumstances it may be possible for the nature of an allegation to be so sensitive that communicating the information to the member who was the subject of the complaint might prejudice the investigation or the preservation of the evidence; however, she emphasised that such a situation would be unlikely to occur. In response to questions from members regarding the rigorous timescale which would be employed in the event of an investigation, the Borough Solicitor confirmed that experienced officers were prepared for the possibility of an increase in future workload, and that in some circumstances outside investigators may have to be appointed.

RESOLVED:

that the Procedure for Local Investigations of Allegations of Misconduct Against Members of the Council as set out in Appendix 1, be noted.

10. **Any Other Urgent Business**

*Planning approaches*

Councillor Powney enquired whether progress had been made on the proposal to move the register of planning approaches from the Director of Environment, Planning and Culture to the Monitoring Officer and publish the register on the internet. Dan Bonifant advised that, in order for this to take place, the Council's Constitution would have to be amended. The amendment would be presented for member approval at the next meeting of the full Council on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2008.

The Chair thanked members and officers for their input over the past municipal year and expressed the hope that he would again have the opportunity to work with them.

11. **Date of the Next Meeting**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting of the Standards Committee would be agreed at the meeting of the full Council on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2008.

The meeting ended at 8.20 pm.

J MANN  
Chair

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