

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Tuesday, 21st February 2006 at 7.40 pm

PRESENT: John Mann (Chair, Independent Member) Nav Mandair (Vice-Chair, Independent Member) and Councillors R Colwill, Hughes and Nerva.

Councillor J Moher was also present for part of the meeting.

1. **Declarations of Interest**

None.

2. **Deputations**

None.

3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting – 22nd November 2005**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 22nd November 2005 be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to recording that at Councillor Colwill's request it was agreed that information on South Dublin County Council's budget for twinning activities should also be sought.

4. **Matters Arising**

None.

5. **Review of Code of Conduct and New Ethical Framework**

The Committee received a report which detailed the Government's response to the Standards Board for England's recommendations for the review of the Code of Conduct for Members, and to the Graham Committee on Standards of Conduct on Public Life's proposals for a review of the new ethical framework. The response also covered the report following on from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Select Committee report from April 2005 and two consultation papers published in August 2004; Review of the Regulatory Framework Governing the Political Activities of Local Government Employees, and a Model Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees.

The Borough Solicitor explained that the changes proposed by the Government were now out for consultation and it was anticipated that it would require a mixture of primary and secondary legislation to bring the changes into effect. The Borough Solicitor explained the Government's response as set out in the report, drawing particular

attention to the view of the Government on retaining politically restricted posts and the undertaking to review the code of conduct.

Reference was made to the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives' (SOLACE) submission to the Government on politically restricted posts. It was felt that this presented a very good case for removing the restrictions and disappointment was expressed at the Government's response to this. It was felt that there should be a national more liberalised standard established and that it should not be left up to individual local authority standards committees. It was noted that the Government now proposed to standardise the salaries of such political assistants at a scale of SCP44 to 49 but this was felt to be too low.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report be noted and, in particular, the potential resource implications arising from the proposed changes to the ethical framework;
- (ii) that the views of the Committee that the restrictions on senior officers carrying out certain party political activities should be relaxed; that standards committees should not be asked to take decisions relating to officer's employment and that the scale of SCP 44 – 49 is too low be forwarded to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM);
- (ii) that a further report be submitted to the Standards Committee once the changes have been introduced.

6. Twinning with South Dublin – a Protocol

The Committee had before them a report which set out the background to the current twinning arrangement with South Dublin County Council and proposed that a protocol be adopted to cover any twinning activities and visits between the two boroughs. This followed on from discussion at the last meeting of the Standards Committee.

The Borough Solicitor explained that she had been very mindful of the comments made at the last meeting of the Standards Committee, particularly concerning the desire to bring forward a shorter guidance note on twinning arrangements and procedures. This had been attempted but it had not been possible to reduce the length of the protocol by very much if the clarity and detail were to be preserved.

Members discussed the budget available for twinning activities and were keen to see explicit reference to this within the protocol. Councillor J Moher commented that the current provision of £4,000 was far too low if the aspirations contained in the protocol were to be

realised. He maintained that the suggested protocol was still too detailed but accepted the basic principles contained within it. He urged the Committee to make strong recommendations to the Executive for an increase in resources to meet the twinning objectives.

The Borough Solicitor reported that South Dublin County Council had been contacted and their initial view was that they agreed with the draft protocol.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the twinning protocol attached to the report be endorsed and subject to further discussion with South Dublin County Council;
- (ii) that a report on the resources available to support twinning activity be submitted to the next meeting of the Standards Committee with a view to the Committee building a case for recommending to the Executive a greater level of resource to support twinning activity in a meaningful way.

7. Standards Networking Event – GLA Visit

The Chair reported on a recent visit by himself and officers to the GLA to attend its Standards Committee. He observed that the agenda for their meeting had been similar to that before the Committee, including a report on the review of the code of conduct. He thanked officers for making the arrangements for the visit.

8. Re-appointment of Independent Members

The Committee was informed that the term of office for the two independent members would end in May 2006 and that therefore the process had started of recruiting two independent members for the period May 2006 to May 2008. It was clarified that the existing independent members were free to apply for re-appointment. There had already been a good response to the advertisement and the closing date was 13th March 2006.

The Borough Solicitor explained that she and the Democratic Services Manager would short-list and interview candidates and that the three political groups would be given the opportunity to identify any possible conflicts of interest in those short-listed. She personally thanked the existing independent members for the support they had given to the work of the Committee over the last few years.

The Chair in turn thanked Members of the Committee for their work over the last twelve months and to the officers that had supported the

Committee. Members of the Committee returned thanks to the Chair for his leadership on the Committee.

9. **Money Laundering**

The Committee received a report detailing the response of Brent Council to the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) 2002 and the Money Laundering Regulations 2003

RESOLVED:-

that the response be noted.

10. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting of the Standards Committee would be agreed at full Council in May 2006.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

JOHN MANN
Chair

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