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Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held at the Forli Room - Town Hall
on 21 October 2009

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Boast (Chairman), Smith (Vice-Chairman), Whiles, Fearon and Nesbitt
Councillors M Todd, S Scott, D Fower and S Lane
Parish Councillor D Batty

OFFICERS PRESENT:

Alex Daynes, Senior Governance Officer
Kim Sawyer, Head of Legal Commercial

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Miners.

2. Declaration of Interests (if any)

None.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2009

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2009 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4. Monitoring Officer's Report - Work Programme

The committee received a report from the Deputy Monitoring Officer and members were asked to consider and approve the work programme for the Standards Committee for the remainder of the civic year. Members of the committee discussed the work programme and highlighted the need maintain the current low levels of complaints while improving Councillor and community understanding of the Code of Conduct and role of the Standards Committee within the Council and the need to increase training for Councillors on Standards issues.

The committee discussed the service levels expected between officers and committee members. The committee accepted that there were other constraints on officers' time and expected that if any agreed action could not be progressed, then officers would either agree a short extension to deadline or alternative action with the Chair, or bring the matter back to Committee; and that controls would be put in place to ensure that actions would not fall into abeyance.

Members of the committee considered ways to raise the profile of Standards within the Council including reviewing the Planning Code of Conduct, briefings at All Party Policy and raising public perception and awareness.

The committee **AGREED** that a report should be submitted to its next meeting concerning Service Levels from officers and a draft questionnaire for Councillors be submitted.

Members received a proposed work programme and discussed its contents. Members recommended inclusion of items such as regular feedback on best practise and general standards issues from other Councils, Licensing and Licensing Act 2003 Code of Good Practice, Parish Council issues, politically restricted posts review, whistle blowing policy and anti-fraud policy.

5. Report Into the Leak of Standards Committee Information

A report into a leak of information following a pre-hearing adjudication sub-committee was received by Members. Members were requested to agree upon the recommendations for preparation and distribution of exempt information for sub-committee meetings of the Standards Committee.

Members discussed the recommendations and the issues around exempt information distribution. The committee **AGREED** the following procedure for distribution of exempt information:

1. No reports will be distributed by email before the meeting
2. Hard copy of the reports will be sent in advance to members of the sub-committee
3. Each copy of the report will be given a unique reference number
4. All copies of the report will be returned to the Democratic Services officer at the end of the meeting and they will be checked off against the named recipient
5. Spare copies will be confidentially destroyed by Democratic Services
6. The file copy will be kept in a locked cupboard

6. Agenda Planning

Members were advised that following full Council on 14 October 2009, there would be only one Conservative Group representative on the committee and a new representative from the English Democrat Group would become a member.

The Chairman advised that a new training DVD was available and members agreed to pass the DVD round after each had watched it.

Details of a training event for independent members of the committee were given. Interested members to contact Democratic Services for further details and if they wished to attend.

The Chairman raised an issue regarding a complaint going 'out of time' before an adjudication hearing could be held. Members discussed the issues and reasons for this occurrence and were reminded of the need to ensure service level agreements were in place to ensure this did not happen again.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Members agreed to the date of the next meeting being 4 November 2009.

CHAIRMAN
7.00 - 8.20 pm