

# Public Document Pack



Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held at the Forli Room - Town Hall  
on 4 November 2009

## MEMBERS PRESENT:

Steve Boast (Chairman), Anne Smith (Vice-Chairman), David Whiles, Orlando Menendez  
and Ron Nesbitt  
Councillors A Miners and D Fower  
Parish Councillors Batty

## OFFICERS PRESENT:

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

### 1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Todd, Cllr Khan, Cllr Murphy, Cllr Hussain and Cllr Goldspink.

### 2. Declaration of Interests (if any)

No declarations were received.

### 3. Monitoring Officer's Report

The committee received a report from the Monitoring Officer that included proposed service standards and a work programme review. The committee was requested to agree upon the service standards and determine the frequency of update reports on complaints received.

#### Questionnaire

Members reviewed the questionnaire for Councillors and recommended the further questions:

“Have you had training other than reading the Code of Conduct yourself over the last 5 years?”

“Would you like to know more about the Standards Committee?”

Members also requested that it was made clear that responses would be anonymous and that if there was not a high response from Councillors then the Leader or deputy Leader of each group should become involved in ensuring responses.

#### Service Standards

Members discussed the proposed service standards and made the following comments:

- A revamped webpage for the committee was needed.
- A complaint tracking report was submitted at each meeting.
- The seriousness of a complaint should be assessed at the early stage of the procedure and an acceptable timeline given for the conclusion of the case, whether 2 months, 3 months, 6 months etc.

- Remove the service standard concerning responses to emails and voicemails in the monitoring officer's absence as this was a Council standard and therefore not specific to this committee.
- Include an extra standard as follows:  
*"If the committee resolves that a particular action within the scope of its terms of reference should be carried out (e.g. communications regarding the role of the committee or arranging training meetings) then the council will allocate specific resources to ensure that the task is completed within the relevant timescale. If resources are unavailable then options will be discussed with the Chairman".*
- Although work for Local Democracy Week was taken up by Neighbourhood Councils, it was resolved to undertake work for Local Democracy Week in 2010.

#### 4. Agenda Planning

Members received the latest work programme and discussed the items on it. The committee advised that the work programme must be manageable and the items on it achievable. Members **RECOMMENDED** the following key items:

Website development – this issues would be raised at a meeting of the Strategic Governance Board. A report would be submitted at the next meeting.

External Communications – work of the Committee to be communicated to the general public more effectively. The committee was advised that Standards for England was sending a toolkit to enable communications teams to achieve this.

Members raised concern about the press coverage of a recent complaint hearing where councillors were able to put their version of events forward without an official Council response. The Monitoring Officer would determine what Council information was submitted to the press and whether a member of the communications team could be identified for Standards issues.

Training – Standards issues should feature as part of the induction package for the next municipal year especially for any new Councillors. The annual report to Council would also offer an opportunity to address Councillors.

Planning Committee – continual monitoring of Planning Committee voting practises.

Members discussed the regular items on the work programme and **AGREED** upon the following:

- Review of complaints procedures to be undertaken with Investigations Team (by January).
- Further guidance waited for updates to the Code of Conduct.
- Training for Committee members to be undertaken after the Annual Council in May and mediation training to be given for members of the committee.

It was suggested that a local review of Standards issues could be carried out to provide local solutions and standards for certain issues instead of national standards being used. The committee recommended forming a sub-committee to carry out this work with Orlando Menendez (chair), Ron Nesbitt and Cllr Batty forming the group.

The committee **AGREED** with the continued use of the Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils to shortlist and recommend Parish Council appointees to the committee.

The deputy Monitoring Officer recommended a press release be issued close to Christmas time that highlighted the rules and procedures for accepting gifts and hospitality. The committee **AGREED** for this to be done.

The meeting of 10 March should include preparations for Local Democracy Week.

The committee was advised that national guidelines regarding Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks was due in December and could therefore, be discussed at the January meeting.

Members were advised that the Audit Commission and Standards for England were to begin information sharing.

**5. Date of Next Meeting**

The committee agreed to hold the next meeting on 13 January 2010.

CHAIRMAN  
7.00 - 7.55 pm

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