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Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held at the Viersen Room - Town Hall
on 17 March 2010

MEMBERS PRESENT:

S Boast (Chairman), A Smith (Vice-Chairman), R Nesbitt, B Fearon and O Menendez
Councillors A Miners and M Todd
Parish Councillors D Batty

OFFICERS PRESENT:

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from David Whiles and Councillor Froggitt.

2. Declaration of Interests (if any)

No declarations of interest were received.

The committee agreed that the discussion in Item 5 of the agenda be led by Cllr Todd to allow all independent members to be impartial in any debate.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2010

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2010 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4. Report of the Monitoring Officer

The Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report, updating members on the following:

- Local Democracy Week;
- Induction of new Members

Members expressed concern that sufficient training on Standards issues was not provided to newly elected or independent members of the council. This was needed to ensure members were confident in carrying out their duties.

Complaints

The committee was advised that one further complaint had been received since the previous meeting and the provisional meeting on 21 April was likely to go ahead as an assessment sub-committee.

Items of Interest

Members received the voting analysis for Planning and Environmental Protection Committee meetings from June 2009 to December 2009 and saw no issues for concern in the patterns of voting or incidents of use of political whip.

The committee was updated on Standards for England issues including proposals to streamline the complaints process including greater powers for the chairman to assess complaints instead of a sub-committee and a simplified Code of Conduct.

Work Programme

Members discussed the development of a new webpage for the Committee with examples from Bolton, Newcastle and South Cambridgeshire councils being provided. Members agreed that information on how to complain should be clearer, more information about what constitutes a complaint should be provided, common questions and answers could be included and more information about the complaints process could be added to a committee webpage.

Members **AGREED** to include a review of the Member/Officer protocol in the work programme. Members of the committee further **AGREED** to include the proposed vetting and barring scheme on the work programme following guidance from Standards for England.

5. Role of the Independent Members

The deputy Monitoring Officer advised members that recommendations from the committee would be submitted to Council regarding:

- The nomination for the Chair of the Standards Committee for the coming civic year; and
- Extending the maximum permitted term of office for independent members to three consecutive terms.

The deputy Monitoring Officer further recommended that Members receive a report on the Terms of Reference of the Standards Committee and its sub-committees at its next meeting.

With the agreement of the Members present, Cllr Todd led a discussion on the role of the independent members on the committee. Members debated the term of office for independent members of the committee. Issues raised in debate included:

- Familiarity with councillors of long-serving members;
- Knowledge and experience gained by longer-serving members;
- Encouragement of new members to join;
- Phased loss and recruitment of new members;
- Suitability of candidates – rigorous application process;
- Development of existing members including substitute members.

Members **AGREED** by majority that there should be no phased appointment process and that for the two independent members already past their second consecutive term a further term of appointment should be allowed; contrary to Standards for England guidance.

Members continued by debating the recruitment procedures for independent members of the committee. Members **AGREED** that the current recruitment process should remain but the criteria for new members should be more robust.

Members also debated the chairmanship of committees and sub-committees. Although the Council would appoint the Chairman and Vice Chairman, the committee would make

recommendations as to who this should be. Orlando Menendez proposed Steve Boast to be Chairman for the next municipal year, this was seconded by Cllr Todd. The committee members **AGREED** to recommend Steve Boast as Chairman. Cllr Todd proposed Anne Smith be Vice-Chairman and Orlando Menendez seconded this. The Committee members **AGREED** to recommend Anne Smith as the Vice-Chairman. Members **AGREED** that more independent members should be used to chair sub-committees.

6. Responses Report

Member received a report giving the results of a questionnaire sent to all councillors to gain their views on the work of the committee.

Members discussed the results and responses of the questionnaire. The committee commented that under 30 per cent of Councillors responded to the questionnaire which was a low response. Members requested the results be broken down into political groups. Members proposed that training on the Code of Conduct and Standards issues be targeted at specific committees rather than general training to all Members. Members **AGREED** that Planning and Environmental Protection, Licensing and Audit committees were approached in the first instance for training. The committee **AGREED** that Members were approached with the questionnaire again and reminded of the presentations given to Neighbourhood Councils to see if this would change the results given.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer agreed to present information given in Officers' inductions to the committee although it was not relevant to their roles.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next provisional date was noted as 21 April 2010.

CHAIRMAN
7.00 - 8.45 pm

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