

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Agenda item 2

13 July 2007

Present: Mrs P. Hudson-Bendersky (in the chair)
Mr S.Lainé (Vice-Chair), Mr J. Leamon, Mr J. Cripps
Parish Councillor S. Fowler
Councillors Tina Franklin and Robin MacDonald.

Apologies: None

Also in attendance: Mr David O'Connor

(4.30 – 5.50 pm)

1. Appointment of new chairman and vice-chairman

The chairman welcomed David O'Connor to the meeting as the new independent member of the standards committee. As this was her last meeting as chairman, she highlighted the need for the committee to elect a new chairman and vice-chairman.

Mr Lainé was proposed as chairman by Mr Cripps and seconded by Councillor Franklin and was duly elected. Mr Leamon was proposed as vice-chairman by Mr Cripps and seconded by Mr Lainé and was duly elected.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2007 be approved and signed as a true record subject to Councillor Prince and Mr Leamon being listed as having given their apologies.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none declared.

4. MEMBERS REPORTS ON ATTENDANCES AT COUNCIL, COMMITTEE AND PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS AND OTHER MEETINGS

The monitoring officer reported that the code of conduct training on 5 July 2007 had gone very well and both sessions had been well attended and provoked lots of questions and discussion. Mr Leamon and Mr Fowler had both attended the Standards Board for England (SBE) Roadshow on the new code of conduct and had found this to be very useful.

The monitoring officer advised that he and Mr Fowler would be attending the sixth annual assembly of standards committees in October in Birmingham.

The chairman advised that she had attended the March Council meeting when the new code of conduct had been accepted with two minor amendments. One related to clarification of "meetings" and the second related to disclosure of confidential information where members felt the code should emphasise the term "guidance"

To be approved at the next meeting of the Standards Committee on 28th of September 2007

when advising members to discuss any proposed disclosures with the monitoring officer prior to taking any action.

The chairman updated the committee on her recent meeting with the deputy leader. He had been pleased with the progress made by the committee and underlined the need for a code of conduct for the Mayor. She had also met the chief executive and he considered the committee's work plan was very reasonable.

4. UPDATE ON LATEST BULLETINS, CASES AND COMPLAINTS

The monitoring officer highlighted some of the main points in the latest bulletin 34. He also advised that there was a requirement to advertise the adoption of a new members code of conduct in the local press and publicise on the council's website by 1 October 2007. The same requirement was also applicable to parish councils. He advised that he had written to all parish councils via their clerks inviting them to share an advert but he had little response to date. The chairman asked the monitoring officer and Parish Councillor Fowler to follow this up with the parish councils.

**** MO, SF****

Mention was made of the new training DVD and the Monitoring Officer indicated that he would arrange a showing at a date reasonably soon after its issue

There were no cases or complaints to report.

5. ANTI FRAUD AND ANTI CORRUPTION POLICY

The monitoring officer advised that the draft policy had been to the audit committee and Councillor MacDonald confirmed that it had been discussed at some length at the last meeting.

RESOLVED The anti fraud and anti corruption policy be approved and recommended to Council for adoption.

6. REVISIONS TO THE REGISTER OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

The monitoring officer advised that it would be necessary for all members, including co-optees, to complete a new register of members interest form by September 2007. The recent training session on the code of conduct had highlighted that many parish councillors were unaware of the requirement to notify any changes to their register of interests within 28 days. There may also be a need to remind members that all hospitality and gifts over £25 had to be declared and would remain on the register indefinitely.

Councillor MacDonald suggested that a regular reminder could be issued to members and parish councillors requesting notification of any changes to their interests. The monitoring officer agreed to consider how this could be done. ****MO****

7. PARTICIPATION IN THE SBE LOCAL FILTER PILOT

The monitoring officer explained that a group of local Standards Committees selected at random one of which was Cheltenham had been invited by the SBE to participate in the local filter pilot and give their feedback on the exercise. He circulated a copy of the pack to each member. He explained that the information it contained related to real cases but had been adapted to retain confidentiality.

The committee agreed to participate and a date and time of 2 p.m. on 1 August 2007 was fixed to carry out the exercise. ****MO,DSM****

8. REVIEW OF PROGRESS AGAINST WORK PLAN

The monitoring officer gave a verbal update of progress against the work plan. It was agreed that the member-officer protocol should have priority over the officer code and the mayor's protocol should be scheduled to start in March 2008.

The chairman requested that a revised workplan be circulated to all members with the minutes of the meeting. ****MO,DSM****

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next ordinary meeting of the Committee will be on 28 September 2007 and members were asked to note the revised start of 4 pm.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The monitoring officer introduced his possible model for collaborative working among standards committees in Gloucestershire which had been circulated with the agenda. He highlighted the advantages of this approach as ensuring consistency, giving the potential to share resources and spreading the cost and workload of local referrals. At this stage he was looking for a clear indication of whether this committee would support the joint approach. He had already discussed it with his fellow monitoring officers in Gloucestershire and their initial response was that it was far more acceptable than the previous approach of a shared standards committee. This approach would ensure that each authority retained their own responsibilities for setting standards within their authority through their standards committee.

Members were generally supportive of the approach however they felt that a local joint subcommittee of twenty one members was too large and suggested two from each council would suffice. The nomination should include an independent member and a councillor. They acknowledged the advantage of having this pool of resources particularly if the SBE ruling was that a member who had been on a local filter panel could not subsequently be on the panel investigating the complaint.

The monitoring officer to progress on this basis. ****MO****

MRS P. HUDSON-BENDERSKY
Chairman