

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Agenda item 2

26 September 2008

Present: Mr Simon Lainé (Chair), Mr Duncan Chittenden, Mr John Cripps, Mr David O'Connor
Parish Councillors Gloria Coleman, Stuart Fowler and Barrie Lewis
Councillors Les Godwin and David Hall

Apologies: Mr Jon Leamon

Also in attendance: Peter Lewis, Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Karen Watson, policy officer (government and customer relations)

(4.00 – 4.55 pm)

The chair welcomed Parish Councillor Gloria Coleman to the committee.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2008 be approved and signed as a true record.

2. MATTERS ARISING

None.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

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

Mr Cripps advised that he had tried to attend a meeting of the Swindon Village Parish Council as published in the diary of meetings circulated but unfortunately the date had been changed. He had taken this up with the Parish Clerk concerned. Parish Councillor Lewis advised that he had been present at a well attended local meeting regarding the floods.

5. UPDATE ON LATEST BULLETINS, CASES AND COMPLAINTS

5A CUSTOMER RELATIONS – POSITION STATEMENT

The policy officer (government and customer relations) introduced her report which had been circulated with the agenda and invited any questions from members. She was particularly keen to have feedback from the committee on what future updates they would like and at what frequency.

Councillor Hall thought that the report was useful but it was not necessary for an officer to attend to present it. He felt it was not within the remit of this committee to look at complaints in general. He was surprised to see that two complaints regarding antisocial behaviour had been referred to the ombudsman.

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The policy officer did not have any more detailed information on these complaints but offered to provide some additional information outside the meeting if required but this was not requested.

The committee noted with admiration that the Council had logged no less than 135 compliments.

Resolved :

- 1. The Committee noted the report detailing the year end position and commended officers for their achievements**
- 2. The Committee receive a similar report at half yearly intervals, to be circulated three weeks before the meeting so that the chair can invite the policy officer to attend if required.**

5B BULLETINS AND COMPLAINTS

The Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer updated members on the Bulletin 40 from the Standards Board for England which had been circulated with the agenda. He advised that he had received three copies of the guidance on local standards framework. He intended to retain one in legal services, give one to the chair and there would be a spare one which other members could borrow on request.

Regarding the eighth annual assembly of the Standards Board, he advised that Mr O'Connor would be taking one place and the remaining place was booked but attendee/s yet to be finalised. He requested that those attending provide a written report back to the next committee on the issues raised.

The bulletin also sought views on adjourning local assessment decisions. He had consulted with other monitoring officers in Gloucestershire and the consensus was that the proposals were too complicated and would not aid the process. Parish Councillor Fowler had also indicated his lack of support for the proposals in an email to him. He proposed to respond to the Standards Board for England with the view that the committee did not support the proposals and they would recommend that local committees should run with the system as currently set out and resolve any problems if and when they occur. This was supported by the committee.

The bulletin also publicised a revised ethical governance toolkit which had been produced by the Standards Board, the IDeA and the Audit Commission working in partnership. A meeting of the corporate governance group last week had considered the toolkit and decided that the Council should adopt it. Officers would be submitting a growth bid for some funding to appoint an external body to carry out the audit which would provide an independent assessment. The Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer advised that Tewkesbury Borough Council had already used the toolkit and were very positive about the exercise. Mr O'Connor was concerned about the difference between ethics and standards and whether such an audit was within the remit of this committee. The Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer said that the Standards Committee had both a proactive and reactive role and their proactive role was to promote good conduct and behaviour. As such both the Standards Committee and the corporate governance group had a role to play in reviewing the results of the ethical governance health check.

Councillor Hall reported that he had contacted the Standards Board for England suggesting that a flow chart be produced to assist in the understanding of the local assessment framework process. They had advised him that one was not available but they thought this was a good idea. The Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

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said he was aware that other councils had tried to produce such a flow chart and he agreed to investigate further.

Resolved

- 1. The committee receive an update at their next meeting from attendees at the Standards Board annual conference**
- 2. The committee instructs the Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer to respond to the Standards Board for England consultation regarding their views on adjourning local assessment decisions**
- 3. The committee supports the use of the ethical governance toolkit to carry out an independent review of the Council's ethical governance**

6. REVIEW OF PROGRESS AGAINST WORK PLAN

The work plan circulated with the agenda was updated following discussions.

The Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer advised that Tewkesbury Borough Council had agreed a joint approach on the organisation of the Standards Committee forum and this was now scheduled for February 2009. In response members said they would welcome a review of emerging protocols and case law from local assessments and a different key speaker as they were already familiar with the views of the previous speaker Peter Keith Lucas.

Regarding the possible joint arrangements with other Standards Committees, the Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer advised that he was not aware of any regulations which formally allowed councils to form these joint arrangements but these could be available in due course. Currently district councils were focusing on getting their local procedures and protocols in place.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next ordinary meeting of the Committee will be on 12 December 2008.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

**Mr Simon Lainé
CHAIRMAN**