

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Agenda item 2

13 March 2009

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

Apologies: Councillor Tina Franklin

Also in attendance: Peter Lewis, Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer and Bryan Parsons, Policy Officer

(4.10 – 5.05 pm)

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December be approved and signed as a true record.

The chair asked what progress had been made on the flowchart referred to in the minutes. The Borough Solicitor advised that a flow chart was included in the guidance pack and a copy would be made available to the initial assessment subcommittee.

**** RR**

Regarding the Register of Members Interests referred to in paragraph 5, the policy officer in attendance reported that a recent meeting of the group leaders had discussed this issue. There was now more pressure from the Audit Commission to ensure the register was available for public information rather than just public inspection. The Democratic Services Manager advised that with the introduction of a new Web system called modern.gov, there would be a facility for allowing members to enter and update their register of interests online as well as recording declarations of interest at specific meetings. This would then be public information available on the council's website. It was agreed that all councillors should receive further guidance on what interests they need to declare and this should continue to be included in member induction training. The Borough Solicitor agreed to consider what guidance needed to be issued with the form.

**** PL**

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr Leamon reported that he had been approached by a person who had discussed an issue with him which he believed might be the subject of a complaint that may be considered by this committee. He was advised by the Borough Solicitor that as the matter was not on the agenda for this meeting he did not need to declare an interest.

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

Three independent members had attended the Budget Council meeting in February.

Members asked for the dates of parish council meetings to be made available to them. **** RR**

4. UPDATE ON LATEST BULLETINS, CASES AND COMPLAINTS

The Borough Solicitor referred members to the latest bulletin 42 from the Standards Board of England which had been circulated with the agenda. He advised the committee that guidance on joint committees was likely to be available in the summer following the introduction of the necessary legislation in May. He reminded the committee that they had received reports on this issue from the previous Borough Solicitor. The general feeling of the committee was that as they had received so few complaints there was no urgency to pursue this at this stage and they hoped that the increased size of the committee would be adequate to support any complaints they did receive.

Regarding indemnification for Standards Committee members, the Borough Solicitor referred members to the minutes of the standards committee meeting on the 11 February 2005 where it had been confirmed that the council's indemnity insurance did provide cover for officers, elected members and co-optees. For this purpose, non elected members of the Standards Committee would be classed as co-optees and so provided they acted in good faith and followed officers advice they would be indemnified. He had asked the chief finance officer for written confirmation that there had been no change in the position. **** PL**

Members agreed that they would like the chair and Mr John Cripps to attend the 2009 Annual Conference along with the Borough Solicitor who would organise the bookings. **** PL**

5. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The policy officer introduced the report of the Assistant Chief Executive which had been circulated with the agenda. The report invited the committee to nominate a representative to sit on the annual governance statement working group.

Resolved that: Mr John Cripps and Parish Councillor Barrie Lewis be nominated to sit on the annual governance statement working group (subject to the recommendation to such a working group being accepted by the Audit Committee on the 19 March 2009)

6. REVIEW OF PROGRESS AGAINST WORK PLAN

The Borough Solicitor reported that due to the pressures of other work he had been unable to spend much time on progressing the Standards Committee Forum. However he was still keen for it to go ahead. It was still his intention to ask Tewkesbury Borough Council to host the event but he anticipated that officers from legal services in Cheltenham may need to take a lead in making it happen.

Regarding the Ethical Health check, the Borough Solicitor referred members to paragraph 1.1 3 of the report they had considered in the previous item. This indicated that the IDeA had already been commissioned by the council for the purposes of a corporate peer review and it was envisaged that many of the issues which would be addressed by an ethical health check would be covered by the wider governance process. Any which were not could, if appropriate, be commissioned from IDeA as an additional exercise.

To be approved at the next meeting of the Standards Committee on 17 July 2009

Regarding joint arrangements, the Borough Solicitor would discuss this with the other monitoring officers in Gloucestershire following the publication of the regulations. However members agreed that there was no great incentive to put this in place due to the small number of complaints they had received and it was unlikely to achieve any great cost savings for this council.

7. DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair had produced the draft annual report which had been circulated with the agenda. Members were supportive of the document and a number of minor points were noted for inclusion in the report. It was agreed that the Democratic Services Manager would make the changes and agree them with the Chair and Borough Solicitor before circulating them with the Council papers.

Resolved that: the Annual report as amended be reported to Council on the 30 March 2009 and the Chair would attend to introduce it.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next ordinary meeting of the Committee will be on 17 July 2009.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Members asked whether it would be possible for future meetings to be diarised to avoid events in Cheltenham such as the Cheltenham Festival.

The Democratic Services Manager agreed to circulate the proposed diary for 2009/10 for comment. **** RR**

The Chair asked members whether they would support him in freezing the allowance paid to independent members of the standards committee and not accepting the increase agreed by Council at their December meeting. Other independent members supported this action which they felt was a matter of principle in the current economic climate.

Resolved that:

i) the independent members of the standards committee request that their allowances should not be increased from April 2009 but remain at the 2008 level

ii) Council should be advised of this decision in their annual report

**Mr Simon Lainé
CHAIRMAN**