

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Standards Committee held on 8th March 2006 at the Town Hall, Runcorn.

Present: Mr. Collins (Chairman), Mr. Luxton, Councillor Parker and Councillor Redhead.

Apologies for absence: Parish Councillor Crawford and Councillor Pearsall.

Absence declared on Council business: None.

Officers present: J. Tradewell and L. Cairns.

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE COMMITTEE

Action

STC12 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11th January 2006, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

STC13 ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER – MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy outlining the number and nature of interests declared by Members during the Municipal Year to date. It was noted that this had been done as a result of a recommendation in the Audit Commission's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter.

Although the Commission's report had been glowing, it had been suggested that the Council should develop its arrangements for monitoring compliance with Member and officer codes of conduct. Consideration had therefore been given to how this could be done and it was proposed that a report be brought to this Committee at each of its meetings giving an overview of what interests had been declared by Members.

The Committee considered a number of issues including:

- level of interests to be declared;
- the Committee's role and the need for monitoring of officers to be done by an alternative, appropriate body; and
- ways the statistical information could be made more meaningful.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) contact be made with other local authorities within Cheshire to ascertain if they have had a similar request from the Audit Commission, to examine whether or not any systems are already in place and if comparative work can be carried out across the authorities; and
- (2) an analysis be carried out on the interests declared to determine whether there is a pattern reflective of the committee structure and of specific issues.

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STC14 GOING LOCAL: INVESTIGATIONS AND HEARINGS

The Committee viewed a guidance DVD that had been produced by the Standards Board outlining how local Standards investigations and hearings should be conducted. It was noted that the purpose of the DVD was to identify how a fair and balanced local investigation should be carried out and to outline the best procedure for a professional and effective hearing.

The Committee discussed the following issues:

- membership of an investigatory hearing panel;
- the process of drafting a decision at a hearing;
- who would carry out the investigatory role and who would advise the Panel at the hearing; and
- appropriate circulation of the DVD.

RESOLVED: That new Members of the Standards Committee in the next Municipal Year be offered the DVD for viewing and consideration.

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STC15 STANDARDS BOARD INFORMATION ROUND UP

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy bringing Members up to date with the latest news from the Standards Board as outlined in Bulletin No. 27.

It was noted that the 5th Annual Assembly of Standards Committees would take place in Birmingham on 16th and 17th October 2006 at which Halton would be allocated a number of places.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted; and

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- (2) the conference be brought to the attention of new Members of the Standards Committee in the 2006/07 Municipal Year.

Meeting ended at 4.45 pm.

