

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Standards Committee Wednesday, 27 February 2008 Committee Room 1, Runcorn Town Hall

Present: Mr B. Badrock (Chairman), Mr T. Luxton, and Councillors Parker, and Redhead

Apologies for Absence: Parish Councillor Crawford, and Councillors Lewis and Wainwright

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Reaney and L. Cairns

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE COMMITTEE

STC15 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 21st November 2007 having been printed and circulated, were approved as a correct record.

STC16 ACTION LIST

The Committee considered the Action List in detail and noted/agreed the following:

- Action 1 – See Minute No. STC18.
- Action 3 – Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council had been contacted and its Monitoring Officer had advised that there were no outstanding issues at the present time. However, Wigan's Monitoring Officer had agreed to contact Halton should this situation change.
- Action 6 – the Executive Board had considered the draft budget and had made a recommendation to full Council, which was meeting the following week. The budget was tight and it was anticipated that training would require funding via existing resources. This included the package proposed in Minute No. STC18.

Action

- Action 7 – the Committee noted the current information available on the Council’s website. It was requested that information be sought as to the number of hits this area received.
- Action 9 – the Monitoring Officer advised that he had reviewed the video of the interview with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive, which was now out of date due to the introduction of the new Code of Conduct. It was requested that the possibility of producing a new video, to be used as a training tool for targets including school children, the general public, Councillors and potential independent members, be investigated.
- Action 12 – it was advised that the two new parishes had now been created. These two parishes would have to adopt the Code of Conduct at their first meeting and it was intended that, following this, a meeting be set up with all the parishes to discuss training needs of parish councillors.
- Action 16 – see Minute No. STC18.
- Action 17 – the Council had registered for two places on the next Standards Board for England Conference. The Standards Board had confirmed that they would notify the Authority as soon as places were available.

STC17 LOCAL ASSESSMENT - CONSULTATION

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy regarding the Communities and Local Government consultation document that had been circulated in respect of local assessment.

It was noted that, on 3rd January 2008, the Local Government Minister, John Healey, had launched a consultation paper on the standards of conduct of local authority councillors. The consultation focused on local authority standards committees becoming responsible for assessing allegations of misconduct against councillors. This was a role currently carried out by the Standards Board for England, whose remit would also change. The Standards Board would be taking on a new strategic role with the responsibility for monitoring and promoting standards and supporting and overseeing local authorities in their application of the Code of Conduct.

As the deadline for responses had been 15th February 2008, a copy of the document had been forwarded to all Members of the Committee for consideration. Provisional comments had been received from one Member and were forwarded to the Department for Communities and

Local Government (DCLG). A copy of these comments was attached at Appendix A to the report. In addition, a “checklist for Local Authorities in the run up to April 2008”, produced by the Standards Board, was also attached to the report.

The Committee noted that it met the legal requirements in terms of its constitution; however, it was considered that additional Members were required in order to assist in the filtering process and to meet Best Practice. The Committee discussed opportunities for stimulating public interest in terms of the need for independent Members, such as updating the Council’s website, providing information in “Inside Halton”, the Council publication delivered to all residents in the Borough, as well as other methods of free engagement, for example publications to schools.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and Council be recommended to amend its Constitution to provide for an additional independent Member and an additional parish council representative on the Standards Committee.

STC18 STANDARDS COMMITTEE TRAINING

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy outlining possible training for Committee Members in preparation of the forthcoming requirement for local assessment and with regards to any possible future hearings.

It was advised that contact had been made with Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council, as agreed at the last meeting, to establish whether there were any imminent hearings that Halton’s Standards Committee could attend. Although Wigan had had a number of hearings in the past, none were currently scheduled; however, Wigan’s Monitoring Officer had agreed to contact Halton should this change in the near future.

In addition, Warrington Borough Council had contacted Halton to ascertain whether Members would be interested in being involved in a proposed training programme on Wednesday 18th June 2008, looking at the implications of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 with a number of other local authorities from the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA). Costs for this training would be met from existing budgets, which would be run by Mr Peter Keith Lucas, a well-known trainer in this area.

In addition, the Standards Board had prepared a local assessment training exercise consisting of a range of anonymised complaints that it had previously dealt with. The paperwork for the exercise was attached as Appendix A to the report and included a complaint handling flowchart for guidance. The Committee considered this information and agreed that a separate training session be arranged following the Election in order that any new Members on the Standards Committee could be party to it.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the actions taken be noted;
- (2) the Committee be involved in the joint training with Warrington Borough Council and the other Association of Greater Manchester Authorities; and
- (3) a separate training session be arranged by the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman to consider the information provided by the Standards Board regarding local assessment in more detail, following the Local Government Elections on 1st May 2008.

STC19 STANDARDS BOARD INFORMATION ROUND-UP

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy providing an update on the latest news from the Standards Board. A copy of Bulletin 36 was attached to the report and Members noted in this document the abolition of the Independent Adjudicator and the transfer of these duties to the Standards Committee. These duties were:

- to consider applications from local authority employees for exemption from political restriction in respect of their posts;
- where appropriate, to issue directions requiring a local authority to include a post in the list of politically restricted posts it maintained; and
- to give general advice, following consultation with appropriate parties, on the application of criteria for designation of a politically restricted post.

In addition, it was advised that, since the publication of the agenda, the Standards Board had released Bulletin 37 and a copy was tabled for Members' information. This Bulletin focused on the implications of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 in terms of the

local framework, local assessment of complaints, and independent and parish council representation.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 4.25 p.m.