

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Standards Committee Wednesday, 3 June 2009 Committee Room 1, Runcorn Town Hall

Present: Mr. T. Luxton (Chair), Parish Councillors Crawford and D. Felix, Mr R. Garner, Councillors Parker and Wharton.

Apologies for Absence: Mr B. Badrock, Councillors Redhead and Wainwright

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Reaney and M. Simpson

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE COMMITTEE

		<i>Action</i>
STC1	LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 URGENT BUSINESS The Board was advised that a matter had arisen which required immediate attention by the Board (Minute 7 refers), therefore, pursuant to Section 100 B(4) and 100 E and due to the timescales involved the Chairman ruled that the item be considered as a matter of urgency.	
STC2	MINUTES The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 th February 2009, having been printed and circulated were agreed and signed as a correct record.	
STC3	MEMBERS INTERESTS The Board received a report of the Strategic Director Corporate and Policy which outlined the local application of the systems for declaration of interests by Members in order to maintain the values of good governance and ethical behaviour. The Board was informed that integrity in local	

government was essential to command the confidence of the community and of all organisations with which the Council came into contact. It was further noted that it was relevant also in relation to financing, competing for limited national and regional resources and recruitment. The two types of personal interests were categorised as follows – personal interests and personal and prejudicial interests. The report also set out Halton Best Practice and the practical expressions of the culture in various forms were detailed in the report for information.

It was advised that the Register of Members' Interests was held by the Committee Services Manager and a register of gifts and hospitality was also maintained by Committee Services where Members were required to register any gifts of hospitality worth £25 or over received in connection with official duties as a Member and the giver of the gift of hospitality.

RESOLVED: That the report be received.

STC4 STANDARDS BOARD INFORMATION ROUNDUP

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Corporate and Policy which brought Members up to date with the latest news from the Standards Board.

It was advised that since the last meeting of the Committee, the Standards Board had released Bulletins 42 and 43 which were appended to the report for information. Members' attention was drawn to the Standards Committee (Further Provisions) Regulations 2009 which were to come into force shortly and would allow the Standards Board to suspend the initial assessment functions of an Authority in appropriate circumstances, and would also enable Councils to establish joint standards committees. It was also noted that the Regulations would amend the powers of standards committees to grant dispensation to Members who would otherwise be unable to take part in Authority business because of a prejudicial interest.

Members were directed to Bulletin 43 where the Standards Board indicated that further guidance had been produced on the question of "other action" in the context of local assessments. It was advised that guidance had been recently published on the Standards Board website and the report outlining this would be brought to the next meeting. The Monitoring Officer gave a very brief overview.

Members were referred to Page 6 of the Bulletin 42 in

terms of getting indemnification arrangements right. It was reported that the Monitoring Officer would ask the insurance section to confirm the position. This would be reported back at the next meeting.

In relation to Information Bulletin 43, the Committee's attention was brought to an article regarding Rossendale Council having won a Standards and Ethics Award. It was advised that this was a strong visible standards campaign with the strapline "Serious about Standards" which helped Rossendale to achieve a sustainability improved rating in its corporate assessment. It was also reported that it had seen resident satisfaction improve by 8% and an increased turn out at local elections.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

STC5 ANNUAL REPORT

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy which summarised the work of the Committee during the last Municipal Year. It was advised that the Committee met on five occasions throughout the Municipal Year and the role of the Standards Committee was outlined in the report for consideration.

It was further noted that this Municipal Year was a time of considerable change in the operation of the Committee and new legislative requirements necessitated the appointment of two additional Members which were Mr. Garner and Rev. Canon Felix who were welcomed onto the Committee. In addition, the Committee also approved the establishment of mutual arrangements with nearby authorities with regard to independent Members when necessary.

It was also noted that joint training sessions with Warrington Borough Council were carried out during the year in order to equip Members as fully as possible for dealing with local assessment. Also Standards Committee section of the Council's web site was developed and publicity was given to the work of the Committee by way of an article in Inside Halton Magazine.

It was further advised that two meetings of the Assessment Sub- Committee had been carried out which required no further action.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Report be noted and referred to Council for information.

STC6 WORK PROGRAMME

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy which sought items for a Work Programme for the next Municipal Year. The Committee was asked to give consideration to further items to be adopted as a Work Programme for the next Municipal Year and it was suggested that training and development be retained as an ongoing action, particularly as the local assessment regime became more established.

It was suggested that Members keep under review the Standards Committee (Further Provisions) Regulations 2009 which were not confirmed as yet by Government.

It was further advised that Members may also wish to consider trends emerging from the quarterly and annual returns provided to the Standards Board by Councils across the country and these were available on the Standards Board web site.

Arising from the discussion, Members queried whether there was a qualified mediator internally who could be used to provide mediation training. In response, it was noted that this would be investigated and the cost would be discovered to source this internally and externally and a report would be brought back to the Committee. It was also suggested that a brainstorming session would be beneficial with a qualified facilitator. It was suggested that a peer group could be set up with a qualified facilitator to discuss matters around Standards and using case studies. In response, it was noted that the Monitoring Officer would discuss the suggestion with the Divisional Manager responsible for Training and it would be investigated whether this idea could be weaved into the Member Development Programme.

It was further suggested that training on the Code of Conduct could be delivered on a six-monthly basis.

The Committee was advised that there was still one place available on the Standards Conference to be held in October. Members again would be asked if they were available to attend.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

STC7 UPDATE FROM ASSESSMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

It was reported that in order to comply with the guideline from Standards Board, of reporting back to Committee on the action that had been carried out by the Monitoring Officer within 3 months from the date of a direction from the Assessment Sub-Committee, this report could not wait until the next scheduled meeting.

The Committee received an update from the Monitoring Officer following a direction from the Assessment Sub-Committee at its meeting in April 2009 and it was noted that the complaint had now been resolved.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 3.55 p.m.