

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held on 22 April 2010 at 7:00 p.m.

Present: Independent Member: Mr. Riddell (Chairman)
Independent Member: (Vice-Chairman)
Cllrs. Dibsdall, Loney, and Mrs. Morris.
Independent Members: Mr. Painter, Mr. Reece and Mr. Smith.
Town/Parish Representatives: Mr. Clarke and Mr. London
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mrs. Bracken, Cllr. Ryan, Mr Austin, Mr Taylor and Mrs. Wallach.

21. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Members agreed that, in future, it would be helpful to include in the reasons given by an Assessment Sub-Committee when deciding to take no further action, some wording which made clear that the complaint had not been substantiated by the evidence provided.

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Committee held on 3 December 2009, the notes of the Review Sub-Committee held on 1 December 2009 and notes of the Assessment Sub-Committees held on 2 February 2010, 2 March 2010 and 8 April be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

23. SATISFACTION SURVEY ON THE LOCAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS (Report No. 3)

The Deputy Monitoring Officer informed Members that the main issue which had come out of the survey was that some complainants and subject members did not appear to fully understand the process. It had therefore been suggested that the complainant and subject members be sent a copy of the Local Assessment procedure with their acknowledgement/notification letters. Members agreed with this suggestion.

Resolved: That the report be noted and the proposed action agreed.

24. COMPLAINTS AND TRAINING (Report No. 4)

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that there had been an increase in complaints between January and March 2010. 11 complaints had been received, with two currently being investigated and 7 being reviewed. The Monitoring Officer stated that 7 of the complaints had related to one parish council and that she had been asked by the Assessment Sub-Committee to make an informal approach to the clerk at that parish council, to offer training and conciliation.

Standards Committee – 22 April 2010

The Monitoring Officer stated that a number of training sessions had been held since the last meeting, with the majority focused on parish councils. She informed Members that a software package was available which provided training to Members on the Code of Conduct but there was a charge of £20 per licence. Members felt that no expenditure should be incurred until after the general election, as a new government might make changes to the current standards regime.

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that she had also done some informal training for one Member at Dunton Green Parish Council, which the member had found very helpful.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

25. STANDARDS BULLETIN NO. 4 (Report No. 5)

The Monitoring Officer apologised to Members, because she had had to submit the Annual Return to Standards for England before being able to circulate it to Members. This was because Standards for England had been having difficulties with their software system, which had meant that a lot of the work she had completed on the Annual Return had been lost and had had to be rewritten. The Standards for England had apologised that the software had not worked.

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that a guidance document had been released by Standards for England on the issue of predetermination. She stated that it was perfectly permissible for Members to hold and express strong opinions, as long as they did not completely close their mind to a debate.

The Chairman noted that he had been serving on the Standards Committee for considerably longer than the Standards for England guidance and stated that he would consider his position if others felt this to be appropriate.

Members discussed the Cllr. Matthews case involving Canterbury City Council, where a criminal charge of corruption had been brought against a councillor. Members noted that although the councillor had been found not guilty when it came to the criminal charge, he might still be subject to the standards regime with its lower standard of proof. Members asked to be kept informed of developments with this case.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

26. WORK PLAN (Report No. 6)

Members discussed the appointment of a new Standards Committee Member. Advertising had taken place but no applicants had come forward. A number of Members suggested that the Committee should look to continue operating without an extra Independent Member until after the election. However, the Monitoring Officer was concerned that the Committee might become overstretched and that meetings might need to be cancelled. It was suggested that the Monitoring Officer investigate whether an Independent Member from a neighbouring standards committee could be recruited.

Resolved: That the Forward Work Programme, as at 22 April 2010, be

Standards Committee – 22 April 2010

approved, as attached.

27. APPOINTMENT OF SUB-COMMITTEES (Report 7)

Resolved:

(a) That the Committee confirm the arrangements for sub-committees for the 2010/11 Municipal Year as set out in Appendix T to the Council's Constitution; and

(b) That approval be given to the proposed timetable for meetings of the Assessment Sub-Committee in the 2010/11 municipal year as set out in para 2 of the report.

28. LAST MEETING FOR COMMITTEE MEMBERS (Item 8)

The Committee thanked Cllr. Keith Loney, who was attending his last meeting of the Standards Committee, and Mr. Peter Hobbs, who had resigned from the Committee in March 2010, for their hard work and dedication during their service to the Committee.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.50 p.m.

Chairman