

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Thursday 25th March 2010

PRESENT – *Councillors K Foster and J Williams.*

PARISH COUNCIL MEMBERS – *Councillor Malowana-Murphy and Councillor Simpson*

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE – *Mr L Loft (Chair), Mr Zahid Aziz, Mrs S Entwistle, Mr B Kiernan and Mrs V Miles.*

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE- *Linda Comstive (Monitoring Officer and Director of Legal Services), Asad Laher, (Legal Services), Sarah Sundhu (Legal Services), Christine Wood, (Democratic Services).*

RESOLUTIONS

25 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Humphrys and Graham, Ms H Kaur-Kalkat and Valerie Webb (Independent Members) and Janie Berry, Legal Services.

26 Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on 8th October 2009

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 8th October 2009 be approved and signed as a correct record.

27 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

28 Matters arising

Verbal Update on progress of the Work Programme

The Committee was informed that several meetings had recently taken place with the Council's Public Relations team, to discuss which articles, in relation to the Standards Committee Work Programme, would be suitable to be published in articles such, as Team Talk and The Shuttle. This was an ambitious, ongoing programme.

When articles were published, the Committee would be informed.

Recruitment Process for New Members

It was reported that one response had been received following the advertisement for the vacant independent member position on the Standards Committee, and that a parish member position was also vacant.

A discussion took place around how to attract new members to the Committee. It was suggested that Darwen Town Council and Parish Councils be informed of the current vacant positions and that the vacancies be advertised on the website and also the Shuttle.

RESOLVED -

1. That Darwen Town Council and the Parish Councils be informed of the current vacant positions.
2. That the vacant positions be advertised on the Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council website and the Council's publication, The Shuttle.

29 Website Demonstration – Ethical Governance

Sarah Sundhu (Legal Services) submitted a website demonstration to the Committee which informed Members of the Draft Ethical Governance and Standards Committee web page that was currently under construction for the Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council website. The page was currently only available on the Council's intranet and could not, at the present time, be viewed externally.

The following headings were currently available on the page:

- Ethical Standards Committee Feedback
- Making a complaint
- Other issues for discussion by the Committee
- Our commitment to high ethical standards
- Questions
- Standards for England
- Council Codes and policies

Members were asked to provide feedback on the draft web page. Suggestions were made in relation to appropriate documents/publications/links that could be available on the page, such as an introduction to Standards for England, links to the code of conduct and Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and details of how to complain about or compliment Local Councillors.

Members were asked to approve that when the draft web page had been completed, having taken into account the Committee's comments, that the draft web page be emailed to all Committee Members for comments, and that the final sign off of the web page be delegated to the Chair of the Committee, Laurence Loft, in May 2010 after the elections had taken place.

It was queried if Independent Members could be permitted access to the Council's intranet. This would be investigated.

RESOLVED -

1. That following completion of the Draft Ethical Governance and Standards Committee web page, the draft page would be emailed to Members of the Standards Committee for comments, prior to final sign off by the Chair of the Committee in May 2010 after the elections had taken place.
2. That those Members in attendance at the meeting agree that their Council ID photographs may appear on the Standards Committee website.
3. That those Members not in attendance at the meeting would be contacted to seek permission for their Council ID photographs to appear on the Standards Committee website.
4. That each Member of the Committee would provide a short form of wording about themselves to appear on the web page i.e. why they joined the committee, role, what it can offer, and email the wording to Phil Llewellyn from Democratic Services at phil.llewellyn@blackburn.gov.uk

30 Training Session

Members viewed the Standards for England DVD 'Assessment made clear' which had been designed to help Standards Committee members and Local Authority Officers involved in the assessment of complaints about elected or co-opted Members.

Dramatised case studies were used to demonstrate the criteria that would guide each decision, including whether an investigation should be conducted locally, or referred to Standards for England. Discussions took place during and after each case study, in which Members sought advice from the Monitoring Officer, in relation to the case study scenarios. The Monitoring Officer provided advice in relation to the case study scenarios, and the advice sought from Committee members.

RESOLVED - That the training DVD be noted.

31 Guidance from the Standards for England on Gifts and Hospitality

The Director of Legal Services submitted a report updating the Committee on the latest guidance provided by the Standards for England on registering gifts and hospitality.

Advice was provided in relation to gifts, hospitality, the code of conduct and the implications of registering gifts for hospitality.

RESOLVED - That the report and guidance be noted.

32 Standards for England Annual Review 2008-09: Local Standards; National Perspectives

The Director of Legal Services submitted a report updating the Committee on the Standards for England Annual Review for 2008-09.

The review set out the results of Standards for England's monitoring activities, revealing how the reformed local standards frameworks was operating in practice. It further noted the ongoing work of Standards for England in positioning itself as a strategic regulator.

The Committee was informed that the full report could be viewed online at <http://www.standardsforengland.gov.uk/Aboutus/corporateinformation/AnnualReviewandReport/>

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

33 Communications

Standards for England Annual Assembly 2009

A report was submitted providing feedback on the Standards for England Annual Assembly 2009.

The eighth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees had been held in Birmingham International Conference Centre on 12th-13th October 2009. Sajeda Khalifa, Senior Solicitor of Legal Services (who had recently left the Authority), and Valerie Webb, Independent Member of the Standards Committee, had been the representatives for Blackburn with Darwen.

The conference had been entitled "Working together to bring standards into focus" and had concentrated in depth at standards in action, providing delegates the opportunity to share good practice examples and to allow

discussion relating to experiences of managing the practicalities of local assessment.

Delegates had been welcomed to the Conference at a preliminary session by Dr Robert Chilton, Chair of Standards for England, and Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive of Standards for England, who had talked about the latest standards statistics and trends and the successes of local assessment.

Further sessions had focused primarily on bringing strategic issues for ethical governance into focus, and had aimed at providing delegates with knowledge and practical resources needed to improve and promote standards and local democracy within their Local Authority.

The Committee was requested to note that more details of the Conference and presentations were available at <http://www.standardsforengland.gov.uk/> and <http://www.annualassembly.co.uk/>

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That thanks and best wishes from the Committee be conveyed to Sajeda Khalifa who had recently left the Authority.

2010 Annual Assembly of Standards Committee ‘A place for Standards’

The Committee was informed that booking was now open for the 2010 Annual Assembly of Standards Committees, ‘A place for Standards’, on 18th and 19th October 2010 at the International Convention Centre, Birmingham.

The Chair commented that this was a very worthwhile event and recommended Members to attend.

Standards for England Bulletins 46 and 47

Standards for England Bulletins 46 and 47 were submitted to the Committee for information.

Cases of interest

Councillor Andy Sutton, Isle of Wight Council

The above case was submitted to the Committee for information.

Councillor John Lynch, Eden District Council

The above case was submitted to the Committee for information.

34 Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED – That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item in view of the fact that the business to be transacted was exempt by virtue of Paragraph 7 Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

35 Verbal Report from the Monitoring Officer

A verbal update was submitted by the Monitoring on complaints that had been received since the last meeting of the Standards Committee on 8th October 2009.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

36 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held on Thursday 22nd July 2010.

Signed.....

Chair of the meeting at which the Minutes were signed

Date.....