

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Thursday, 4th April 2013

PRESENT – *Councillor John Slater (Vice-Chair) Councillors K Foster, F Oldfield, P Riley, S Hussain, B Taylor, D Walsh*

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE – *Mr P Fletcher and Mr Tassadaq Hussain*

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE- *Asad Laher (Legal Services) and Christine Wood (Democratic Services)*

RESOLUTIONS

9 Welcome and Apologies

The Vice-Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular Mr Paul Fletcher who was attending a meeting of the Standards Committee for the first time. Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hirst, Maxfield and Rehman.

10 Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on 14th January 2013

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th January 2013 be approved and signed as a correct record.

11 Declarations of Interest

Councillors Phil Riley and Brian Taylor declared an interest in agenda item 5 (Complaints Update) and remained in the meeting during submission of the item.

12 Training for Members

Members were advised of the recent publication by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), 'Openness and transparency on personal interest, a guide for councillors'. The guide gave basic practical information about how to be open and transparent about personal interests. It was designed to help Councillors, including Parish Councillors, in relation to the new standards arrangements that had been introduced by the Localism Act 2011.

RESOLVED – That a copy of the DCLG guidance for Councillors as referred to above be made available to all Members of the Council.

Licensing

The Committee was advised that the Constitution had recently been amended to reflect that Members of the Council, who had attended annual training, in relation to licensing matters, would now be permitted to substitute at meetings of the Licensing Committee and Licensing Sub Committees.

Councillors for hire who give firms planning advice

Members were advised of a recent article published in the Daily Telegraph 'Councillors for hire who give firms planning advice' regarding Councillors across England offering themselves for hire to property developers who were hoping to take advantage of relaxed planning laws which would be coming into effect. The article had reported that "Local government politicians were trading on their inside knowledge of the planning system to receive fees of up to £20,000 for advice on how to get developments approved".

A discussion took place around the issue in which Members expressed their disapproval of the practice and agreed that it would demonstrate a conflict for Members in their roles as Councillors.

The Committee requested that the national legal implications guidance in relation to this type of practice be sought with a view to formulating policy guidance for Members of the Council at Blackburn with Darwen.

RESOLVED –

1. That national legal implications guidance in relation to the above issue be sought; and
2. That the above issue be an item on the agenda for a future meeting of the Standards Committee.

13 Complaints Update

A report was submitted to inform Members of the outcome of investigations into allegations made by ten members of the public against eleven members of the Planning and Highways Committee held on 15th December 2011.

Background details to the allegations were outlined in the report.

Members were advised that the Monitoring officer had concluded that there had been no failure by the eleven Councillors to comply with the code of conduct.

RESOLVED – That the Standards Committee note the update.

14 Website for Standards Committee

Members were updated in relation to ongoing work in preparation for the draft Standards Committee web page. It was anticipated that the web page would soon become live.

Members were advised of the obligation of the authority to make available on the Blackburn with Darwen Council Standards web page, details of registers of interests of Parish Councils.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

15 Request for Dispensations

The Committee was advised of the receipt of a letter from Local Government Minister Brandon Lewis to local authority leaders, explaining that Councillors did not need to declare their interest as a Council Tax payer and seek a dispensation to take part in Council discussions or votes about Council Tax setting.

A copy of the letter was made available to the Committee. Members were advised that it would be the responsibility of individual authorities to set their own procedures in relation to Councillors and Council Tax setting.

RESOLVED –

1. That the information be noted; and
2. That the above issue be an item on the agenda for the meeting of the Standards Committee on 4th July 2013.

16 Dates for meetings of the Standards Committee

The Committee was advised of the dates of meetings of the Standards Committee for 2013/2014 as follows:

4th July 2013, 3rd October 2013, 9th January 2014 and 20th March 2014.

17 Action Plan for future meetings

It was suggested that at each meeting details of an action plan be recorded detailing agreed actions and designated officer/s responsibilities as follows:

<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>DESIGNATED OFFICER</u>
Circulate recent DCLG guidance to all Members of the Council	Asad Laher
Investigate legal implications and formulate council policy to uphold Standards which will be submitted to a future meeting of the Standards Committee for adoption	Asad Laher
Presentation of the draft Standards web page to be submitted to the next meeting of the Standards Committee	Asad Laher
Council Tax setting – Request for dispensations. Individual authority procedures for future meeting.	Asad Laher

Signed.....

Chair of the meeting at which the Minutes were signed

Date.....