



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Held: WEDNESDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2004 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Mrs Caroline Roberts (Independent Member) - Chair

Councillor O'Brien Councillor Draycott

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests they might have in the business to be discussed, and/or indicate that Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applied to them.

No such declarations were made at this time.

16. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2004, as entered in the Minute Book on pages 4-7 inclusive, copies of which had been circulated to Members, be received, taken as read, and signed by the Chair as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

That Resolution (2) under Item 12, "That Members of the Standards Committee seek agreement to their attendance at the meeting of the Resources and Equal Opportunities Scrutiny Committee on 21 October 2004, when the consultation documents would receive consideration," be deleted.

17. ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE

1) Third Annual Assembly of Standards Committee

Caroline Roberts stated that, as much of the issue which would have been reported back to the Committee had been superseded and was covered under Item 5, New Ethical Framework Regulations, she would not report back at this time.

2) Fourth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees

It was noted that the venue for the conference was to be the International Conference Centre, Birmingham. Caroline Roberts reported that she had been invited, and agreed, to continue to be a member of the Steering Committee for the Standards Board for England.

The submission of suitable topics was discussed and it was stated that suggestions could be made prior to a meeting in January where this was to be decided.

18. MEMBERS TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Service Director (Democratic Services) gave a brief presentation on the current and planned training and development for Elected Members and the role of the Members Development Forum. The objectives, progress to date, stages of training and development delivered in 2003/4, percentages of Members trained in each area and types of training and development offered were addressed.

Discussion took place regarding the balance between the provision of in-house and external training and it was explained to Members that, traditionally, training on specific issues had been in-house, but there was scope for external training, as exemplified by training which had been arranged in conjunction with De Montfort University. It was felt that this could be further developed in order to avoid the perception of 'institutionalisation' amongst Members. However, it was recognised that external providers needed to have a sensitivity towards local issues within the Council and should be briefed on these.

The timings of training sessions were discussed and it was pointed out that Members all had different circumstances which could lead to difficulty in some Members receiving training and development which they required. It was suggested that other options could be explored such as using CD ROMs. It was also suggested that an allowance system could be useful so that Members could individually make use of external development opportunities. Members also stated that they felt it was essential to provide regular training on benefits and allowances.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the presentation.

19. NEW ETHICAL FRAMEWORK REGULATIONS

The Town Clerk and Corporate Director of Resources, Access and Diversity submitted a report that informed the Committee of regulations that provided for monitoring officers to carry out investigations into alleged breaches by members of their code of conduct which had been referred to them by an Ethical Standards Officer prior to his/her having carried out or concluded an investigation. The regulations also provided for Standards Committees to make

determinations following such monitoring officer's reports and clarified that the Standards Board may issue advice to monitoring officers and local Standards Committees.

Members discussed the importance of all Members being aware of the new procedures and it was felt that notification through the Members' Bulletin would be insufficient. It was suggested that a report be circulated to all Members and co-optees which should have an eye-catching design to differentiate it from other reports. It was also discussed that this provided an opportunity to indicate the significance of this Committee to the rest of the Council.

It was explained to Members that the Standards Committee has autonomy on the decisions and that they are not obliged to follow the Monitoring Officer's recommendations following an investigation.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Committee note the contents of the Local determination (Amendment) Regulations 2004 and Standards Board for England (Functions) Order 2004 and also the associated Standards Board for England Guidance.
- 2) That the Committee approve the proposed mechanisms to ensure the awareness of these new procedures for Members, Co-opted Members, officers and members of the public as detailed in paragraph 2.7 of the report, with the addition of a separate briefing report to be sent to all Members on this matter.

20. CODE OF CONDUCT : REGISTERING OF INTERESTS AND FREEMASONRY - REVISED GUIDANCE

The Town Clerk and Corporate Director of Resources, Access and Diversity submitted a report that advised Members on the revised guidance issued by the Standards Board for England in relation to Members Declarations concerning Freemasonry membership.

Members discussed the potential for the requirement to declare membership of the Grand Charity to be seen as discriminatory, as it was understood that most religious organisations held charitable status, yet their members were not obliged to declare membership of such organisations.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

- 1) note the updated guidance on Declarations of Interest by Freemasons produced by the Standards Board for England; and
- 2) endorse that the attention be drawn, by letter, to all Members

of Council, including Co-opted Members, regarding this updated guidance as produced by the Standards Board for England.

21. COMPLAINTS AGAINST ELECTED MEMBERS

The Town Clerk and Corporate Director of Resources, Access and Diversity briefed Members on the current number and nature of complaints against Elected Members which had been referred to the Standards Board.

Members asked if an indication could be given on when these investigations would be completed, as it was believed that the longer an investigation took the less effective it would be.

It was explained that investigations took approximately six months from lodging a complaint to completion. However, now that new regulations were in place, it was hoped that the timescale would be reduced for any future investigations.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report.

22. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

The Town Clerk circulated the booklet, "Lobby Groups, dual-hatted members and the Code of Conduct," for information, and stated that a copy would be sent to all Members.

23. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 6.20pm.

