



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Held: WEDNESDAY, 17 MARCH 2010 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Mrs Sheila Brucciani (Independent Member) – Chair

Ms Kate McLeod
Ms Mary Ray

Independent Member
Independent Member

Councillor Mary Draycott

Councillor Shelton

125. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Keeling, Scuplak and Thomas.

126. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests that they may have in the business on the agenda and/or indicate if Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applied to them. No such declarations were made.

127. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Committee held on 13 January 2010

Minute 113 – Code of Practice for Member involvement in Development Control Decisions

Members stated that the meeting had resolved that the Head of Planning Management and Delivery be requested to ask officers to inform Ward Councillors where a Councillor had made representation or a request for a Committee decision on a planning application which was not in their ward. They queried whether any progress had been made in respect of this request. Members stated that it would be useful if the Head of Planning Management and Delivery would email all Councillors to inform them of the new procedure. The Director of Corporate Governance confirmed that he would look into this and report back to the Committee.

Minute 116 – Petitions Process

Members queried the progress that had been made into the requested review of the petitions process. They also requested that the petitions monitoring report, as requested at the previous meeting, be completed and circulated, and action taken to address the concerns of Members, as a matter of urgency.

There was some discussion at the meeting as to whether the petition process was a responsibility of Internal Audit or the Standards Committee. It was commented that there had not been any complaints about Councillors failing to act on petitions, however observations were made that the issue was also about accountability and transparency and should therefore fall within the remit of the Standards Committee.

Members suggested that as there were corporate standards for responding to letters from members of the public, it would also be appropriate to have timescales between each stage in the petitions process set out in a flow chart, so that the petitioner would know when they could expect a response.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that officers were looking into the concerns relating to the petition process expressed at the meeting of the Standards Committee in January, and he would report back to members on the progress.

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 13 January 2010 be agreed as a correct record.

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Committee held on 8 February 2010

Minute 122 – Private Session

Members requested a change of wording to the second sentence in paragraph 2 to read as follows:

Members felt that as the investigator had concluded that *there was no breach of the Code of Conduct* on the part of the Councillor, it would be in the public interest to consider the matter in private.

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held 8 February, subject to the above amendment be agreed as a correct record.

128. COMPLAINTS ABOUT COUNCILLORS - INFORMATION FOR COUNCILLORS

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report and an amended flow chart that asked Members to agree the content of publicity information, which provided details on the procedure that was followed when a concern was raised about a Councillor's conduct.

Members made the following suggestions:

- It would be useful to put the information into a leaflet which informed Councillors of the procedure that would be followed if a complaint was made against them. It was felt that a leaflet would be more substantial than a single sheet of paper and it was further suggested that it should be included in newly elected Councillors' information packs.
- The role of the Monitoring Officer should be highlighted, as he had a high profile during the first stages of the complaints procedure and the flow chart did not fully indicate this.
- It would be helpful to give more prominence to the text which stated that the Member would be notified of the outcome in writing, as this was a crucial stage in the procedure.
- Where the complaint had been investigated and it was agreed that no further action should be taken, the Member was entitled to request no publicity.

RESOLVED:

that the Complaints against Councillors - Information for Councillors be amended on the basis of the comments made by the Committee.

129. TERM OF OFFICE FOR INDEPENDENT MEMBERS AND CHAIRS

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report that concerned whether the Independent Members and Chair of the Standards Committee should have fixed term of office, and if so how long that should be.

Members of the Committee considered the report and the following points were made:

- At present there was no fixed term for independent members and it was questioned whether a fixed period of office would encourage more people to apply for the positions. It was also acknowledged though that this could lead to difficulties if insufficient people came forward to apply for the position.
- It was questioned whether a fixed term of office would make it easier for independent members to remain independent, because they would not have the opportunity to become so well acquainted with the Councillors. Comments were made that it was felt that the independent members

would retain their independence, however it was acknowledged that the perception of independence was very important.

- Members generally favoured limiting terms of office to two, four year terms.
- The possibility of rotating the Chair was discussed but it was noted that the current Independent Chair was appointed into that role after the position was advertised. The Monitoring Officer advised that the appointment of Chair needed to be made publicly.
- Members agreed that it would be useful to stagger the appointments to ensure that there was always an experienced independent member on the Committee.
- The possibility of increasing the number of independent members on the Committee from three to four was raised. It was noted that such an increase in independent members would need to be approved by Council and the number of elected members would also be affected.

Members requested that the Monitoring Officer submit a report for consideration at the next Standards Committee meeting, when more elected members would be present.

RESOLVED:

that the Monitoring Officer submit a report incorporating the comments of the Committee, to be brought back to the next meeting of the Standards Committee.

130. STANDARDS FOR BLOGGING - GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS

The Monitoring Officer submitted a briefing note from Standards for England that provided guidance on Standards for Blogging for Members.

Members commented that the briefing note offered sensible guidance and the use of technology in this way could be effective in engaging with people who were not being reached in more traditional ways. The Monitoring Officer commented that the Young People's Election would be held soon and people would be able to vote in different ways including by text messaging and voting online. Members suggested that it might be possible to put a video of the Standards Committee onto Facebook.

RESOLVED:

that the briefing report be noted.

131. STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND - BULLETIN 47

The Monitoring Officer submitted the latest Bulletin from Standards for England.

There was a general discussion around various suggestions arising from the bulletin, but no specific recommendations came out of the discussion and there was no consensus of opinion.

RESOLVED:

that the bulletin be noted.

132. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2010

The Monitoring Officer submitted the Standards Committee Annual Work Programme for 2010.

Members requested that the new Mayor should be invited to the next meeting of the Standards Committee and the Leader be invited to the following meeting.

RESOLVED:

that the Standards Committee Annual Work Programme be amended to include the comments mentioned above.

133. CLOSE OF BUSINESS

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm