



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Held: WEDNESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2011 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Mrs Sheila Brucciani (Independent Member) - Chair

Councillor Clair
Councillor Porter

Councillor Draycott
Councillor Potter

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28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Kate McLeod, Mary Ray and Councillors Thomas and Keeling.

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

30. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee, held on 24 November 2010, be confirmed as a correct record.

31. IMPLICATIONS OF USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Jill Craig, Director of Information Support and John Doyle, Head of Information Security were present to discuss issues regarding safe and appropriate use of social networking sites.

It was noted that the policies and guidance were written before the widespread use of such sites took off. Training would be revisited for members after the local election in May. Jill suggested that the Code of Conduct could be linked into any guidance, and that issues of concern could be dealt with at a Group or Council level. It was noted that there was also some detail about blogging in the Standards for England Case Review 2010.

The difficulty of discerning what was in a councillor's official capacity or private life was discussed, particularly when Council-hosted websites could link to other websites. It was noted that if Council equipment was used, it would fall under the code of conduct. It was suggested that current councillors who had fully embraced social media could be invited to carry out workshops for members after the local election. It was noted, however, that there was generally a poor take-up of training that was offered for members. It was suggested that officers could be invited to group meetings to advise members.

John drew Members' attention to a document, "Connected Councillors – A guide to using social media to support leadership," published by IDeA, details of which would be circulated after the meeting.

32. CASE REVIEW 2010

The Director of Corporate Governance submitted the Standards for England Case Review 2010.

Members considered the issue of when a councillor was acting in his or her official capacity. The Chair stated that a note regarding acting in official capacity, on page 13 of the document could be included in reports regarding complaints against councillors. The Director of Corporate Governance stated that there would be no amendments to Section 52 of the Local Government Act 2000 in advance of the implementation of changes to the standards regime as indicated in the Localism Bill.

A query was raised regarding a hypothetical situation whereby it appeared that a member who was also a taxi driver and the subject of a matter to be taken to the Licensing Sub-Committee, would not be able to attend for their own case. The Director of Corporate Governance stated that this would be reconsidered, as a person would have a right to defend themselves.

RESOLVED:

That the Case Review 2010 be noted.

33. THE DECENTRALISATION AND LOCALISM BILL AND ITS IMPACT ON THE FUTURE OF STANDARDS

The Director of Corporate Governance submitted a report that informed the

Standards Committee of the contents of the Localism Bill in relation to standards.

Members considered when would be the appropriate time to consider and make recommendations to Council on what local arrangements could be put in place. Factors such as the local election in May, the elected mayor and the potential for the Bill to be amended over the coming year were noted. The Monitoring Officer suggested that the Council's Political Conventions could be used to form a local code of conduct. The current arrangements would continue for some time, and there would follow a transition period.

The Chair stated that she would prepare a report in conjunction with the other independent members on what they considered to be appropriate future arrangements. She invited members to submit their ideas to her. It was suggested that memberships fixed for a period of time would ensure a level of expertise, but it was noted that appointments to committees were a political group decision.

Members considered whether the elected mayor would be subject to a local code of conduct. It was suggested that research could be done on this matter to see what arrangements were in place in other authorities with an elected mayor.

RESOLVED:

That the Chair, in conjunction with the other independent members, will submit a document for further discussion to the next meeting.

34. ESTABLISHMENT OF HEARING SUB-COMMITTEE

The Director of Corporate Governance submitted a report that asked the Standards Committee to establish a Hearing Sub-Committee to carry out hearings of investigators' reports into complaints against councillors.

It was noted that Standards for England guidance recommended that a sub-committee be set up for this purpose, and that a hearing involving the full committee membership would be impractical. It was suggested that, as hearings were generally to be held in public, other members of the committee could observe.

Concern was raised regarding the selection of members by the Monitoring Officer, and it was reported that rules about bias did not apply, according to case law. Members were appointed to sub-committees in as equitable a way as possible.

Members felt that the consideration of an investigator's report should still be carried out by the full committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Standards Committee establishes a Hearing Sub-

Committee with the terms of reference as set out in the report.

35. WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of Corporate Governance submitted a draft work programme for the Standards Committee.

Members asked that the Leader of the Council be invited to the next meeting to discuss his role in relation to standards within the Council.

RESOLVED:

That the Standards Committee work programme be approved, with the addition of inviting the Leader to the next meeting.

36. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.00pm.