



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 14 JULY 2011 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Sheila Brucciani (Independent Member) - Chair

Kate McLeod
Mary Ray

Independent Member
Independent Member

Councillor Porter
Councillor Willmott

Councillor Westley

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Nalyor, Osman and Thomas.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests 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.

3. STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Chair welcomed new Members to the Committee and all present introduced themselves.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Members noted that the attendance was incorrect and Sheila Brucciani, Mary Ray, Councillors Draycott, Keeling, Potter, Scuplak and Thomas were present.

Members asked for a progress update on the revising of the social networking usage document and noted a previous suggestion that Members who were proficient in the use of such sites could hold workshops for those who were less familiar with them.

It was noted that the revised etiquette guide had been included in new Members' induction packs. Members asked that this be circulated to longer standing Members also.

With regard to the work programme, the Chair asked Members to suggest people who could be invited to discuss standards issues. It was noted that the Lord Mayor was to attend the September 2011 meeting. Membership of the Committee was also discussed, including potential co-optees or standing invitees. Members stressed the need for an appropriate selection process.

The Chair reported that she had been involved in training for new Members.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the above amendment to the attendance, the minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2011 be confirmed as a correct record.

5. STANDARDS COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

Members were asked to note the Terms of Reference for the Standards Committee and its sub-committees and to agree an amendment to the Hearing Sub-Committee Terms of Reference.

Some concern was expressed regarding the potential for sharing members on sub-committees with the County Council and it was explained that this was only to cover exceptional circumstances when a meeting had to take place within a certain time scale and any of the City Council's Standards Committee Independent Members were unavailable. The Director of Corporate Governance agreed to clarify the legislation on the matter.

Members asked whether the Code of Conduct and the local assessment of complaints applied to the City Mayor. The Director of Corporate Governance stated that he believed that they did not, but that the City Mayor had agreed to be bound by them. The meeting considered how the changes to the regime could change this.

Following discussion, Members agreed that the suggested amendment to the Hearing Sub-Committee be discarded, but that Paragraph 4 be amended to read, "Frequency of meetings: The Sub-Committee shall meet as and when required."

RESOLVED

That the Terms of Reference for the Standards Committee and its Sub-Committees be noted and that an amendment be made to Paragraph 4 of the Hearing Sub-Committee Terms of Reference to read:

4. Frequency of meetings: The Sub-Committee shall meet as and when required.”

6. THE CURRENT ROLE AND FUTURE OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Director of Corporate Governance gave a presentation that outlined the current Standards regime and asked Members to consider how to address future changes that were likely to arise from the Localism Bill.

He drew Members’ attention to Pledge 69 of the City Mayor’s 100 Days Pledge, which stated, “Building on the current Register of Interests begin work to explore how independent oversight and scrutiny of standards and conduct of elected members can be improved.”

Members stated that Leicester City Council was one of the first authorities to establish a Standards Committee. They felt it was important to retain an independent element to the membership in any future arrangements. It was felt that this should be continued. Members recognised the problems with the current complaints system and wanted a less bureaucratic way of dealing with complaints, such as initial informal dispute resolution or in conjunction with group whips.

Members discussed the issue of the removal of powers to sanction and considered how monitoring standards could be effective. It was suggested that censure in itself was a powerful sanction and that there was also opportunity for sanction within political groups.

It was suggested that the system in place in Wales could be investigated whereby the Ombudsman dealt with complaints against councillors. However, it was also suggested that councillors were democratically elected and they should be judged by their electors. It was felt that the ability to interact more closely with complainants would be beneficial, as a way of improving understanding. The need for adequate resourcing of any new arrangements was stressed.

Members considered how to progress with preparing for the change in regime. Following discussion it was agreed that the Independent Members would prepare a draft proposal for the next meeting, with assistance from the Director of Corporate Governance. It was noted that new arrangements would have to be agreed by Council.

RESOLVED:

That the Independent Members prepare a draft proposal for the next meeting, with assistance from the Director of Corporate Governance on the future Standards arrangements at Leicester

City Council.

7. LOCAL ASSESSMENT OF COMPLAINTS SUMMARY JANUARY TO JUNE 2011

The Director of Corporate Governance submitted a biannual report summarising complaints against councillors that had been received in the last six months and gave a comparison to previous six month periods.

It was noted that there had been a larger volume of complaints over this period, but this was to be expected in the run up to a local election. It was also noted that the first hearing had taken place and learning points had been identified for any future hearings.

Members asked that a summary of the complaints be included in future reports as long as such a summary would not disclose too much information.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

8. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair stated that a Standards Committee Annual Report would be prepared to report to Council on the work of the Committee in 2010/11. The draft would be submitted to the September meeting of the Committee.

9. WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of Corporate Governance submitted the Standards Committee Work Programme for the municipal year 2011/12.

It was noted that the draft proposal on the future of Standards would be submitted to the next meeting.

It was suggested that a paragraph could be added to the Standards web page to inform the public that the complaints regime was to end in the near future and the Council was considering future developments.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted and amended as above.

10. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.04pm.

