



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Held: WEDNESDAY, 16 MARCH 2011 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Mrs Sheila Brucciani (Independent Member)
Ms Kate McLeod (Independent Member)
Ms Mary Ray (Independent Member)

Councillor Mary Draycott MBE Councillor Keeling

Also In Attendance

Councillor Roger Blackmore The Lord Mayor

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Kate Macleod.

38. 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.

39. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair reviewed the minutes.

With regard to minute 31, Implications of Social Networking Sites. It was noted that a request had been made for policies in this area to be submitted to the Committee for consideration when they were reviewed. It was also hoped that those Councillors who were proficient in social networking would get involved in the training of other Members.

With regard to minute 33, The Decentralisation and Localism Bill and its Impact on the Future of Standards, Members were asked to consider ways in which Standards could be dealt with in the new regime. The Chair asked that any

thoughts / comments be provided to her.

With regard to minute 35, it was noted that the Leader of the Council had been invited to the Committee, but had been unable to make it.

40. STANDARDS COMMITTEE SECOND ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair of the Standards Committee submitted a report which noted the achievements of the Standards Committee for the period 1 July 2009 – 30 June 2010 and considered the challenges for the year ahead.

It was noted that the report was slightly historical now due to the period that it covered. It was also a time in which there was relatively little Standards activity. It was intended to produce a further annual report in November to cover the period from June 2010 to June 2011.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

41. LEICESTER CITY COUNCIL: FULL COUNCIL ETIQUETTE GUIDE

The Director of Corporate Governance submitted an etiquette guide for Members' use in Council meetings.

Members made a number of comments as follows:-

- There needed to be an amendment to show that Council questions would be required to be submitted 2 days prior to the meeting.
- A line would need to be included to show that political groups have different internal processes with regard to submitting questions and that the group whips should be consulted about this.
- It was felt that a check should be undertaken on recent changes to the Constitution – whether they affected the content of the guide.
- The reference to Blackberry's was felt to be too prescriptive – there were a range of different electronic communications devices available – 'handheld communications media' was suggested.
- A range of views were put forward with regard to the use of electronic media / laptops etc. Whilst some felt that it was inappropriate and disrespectful – others noted that it was undeniably allowed and that there were other disrespectful activities (i.e. reading newspapers) which took place. It was overall agreed that the document was correct in making it clear that the use of devices / tweeting was allowed, but judgement should be used wisely as excessive use would not look good on the webcast or to the gallery.
- The sections on Visitors and constituents should be brought together.
- It needed to be made clear that guests/ visitors could not take part in the meeting.
- In the section on visitors, the reference to the Lord Mayor shouldn't be a 'him' reference.
- There needed to be clarification of the facilities (or lack of them), ie

toilets/ refreshments, for guests and for the accommodation of disabled guests / visitors – A phone number and reference to relevant area on the website was suggested.

- A separate section on what to do if wishing to speak was suggested. This could cover, catching the Lord Mayor's attention, using microphones, addressing the Lord Mayor, timing of speeches etc.
- The comment on disclosing confidential information needed moving and having its own section, where the issues around talking about individuals needed clarifying.

RESOLVED:

That the document be revised based on the comments above, circulated to Committee Members for further consideration and be included in the information packs for new Councillors in May.

42. STANDARDS COMMITTEE 2011 WORK PROGRAMME : MARCH 2011

The Director of Corporate Governance submitted the Standards Committee 2011 Work Programme: March 2011.

It was proposed that an early request be put to the City Mayor and the new Lord Mayor to attend Standards Committee meetings in near future.

A discussion needed to take place at the June meeting about developing the training for new Councillors in Standards matters. It was felt that what took place after the 2007 election should be the basis for this. A comment was made that the situation with the future of Standards was currently very much in flux and training should be held off until this becomes clearer. However it was also noted that the current regime would still be in place until April 2012.

It was thought that an item on the Localism Bill would be needed for the June meeting.

It was requested that a comment be put on record to note that the Director of Corporate Governance had sent advice to Councillors stating that the Standards regime shouldn't be used as a political tool in the run up to the election. It was also noted that Standards Complaints had significantly increased recently.

Efforts should be made for Standards Committee members to take place in the training programme for new Councillors to demonstrate the importance of Standards in all Council matters.

A query was raised with regard to Standards complaints made against Councillors who weren't re-elected. The Head of Litigation commented that a decision would need to be taken on the seriousness of the complaint, but there could certainly be cases which were pursued even though a Councillor was not re-elected.

It was requested that a standing item be added to the agenda which provided

an update – verbally was sufficient – on the outstanding complaints in the system.

RESOLVED:

That the comments / suggestions as above be added into the work programme as appropriate.

43. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

Public Hearing

The Head of Litigation updated the Committee on the recent public hearing considering a complaint against Councillors Dawood and Osman. It was noted that they were found not to be acting in an official capacity, therefore the hearing was dropped.

The Chair commented that there were a number of learning points which arose from this process which could be used in future training exercises. She would be speaking to the Director of Corporate Governance to progress this.

Some comment was made about the general issues regarding how the Standards regime judged whether Councillors were acting in an official capacity or not, feeling that the public wouldn't understand rulings in this area. Others however felt that in this particular case, the decision was the right one based on the facts and evidence presented.

Councillor Draycott

Councillor Draycott informed the meeting that this would be her last meeting as she would not be standing in the forthcoming elections. She thanked everyone who had been involved in the Standards meetings. She had hoped that the Standards regime could have been more effective, but good work had been undertaken.

The Chair thanked Councillor Draycott for all her time and help on the Committee and wished her well for the future.