

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

13th January 2010

Present: Councillor: Andrew Baldwin

Parish Council Representative: David Herson

Independent Representatives: Eric Blackburn (Chairman), Mary Jagger
(Vice-Chairman), David Tilsley

Apologies: Councillors Duncan England, Sheila Matthews, Pat Rutherford,
Claire Vickers, Keith Wilkins
John Charles, David Coldwell, Alan Grant (Parish Council
Representatives)
Paul Byford (Independent Representative)

SC/24 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21st October 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the amendment of the first sentence of Minute No. SC/18 to read: "Mary Jagger reported that she and David Tilsley had recently attended...".

SC/25 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/26 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed David Herson, the recently appointed Parish Council representative, and Sarah Smith, the recently appointed Senior Solicitor (Monitoring/Standards), to their first meeting of the Committee.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, congratulated Karen Jordan, Standards Support Officer on her appointment to a post in the Performance Management department of the Council and thanked her for her invaluable support since the inception of this Committee.

The Monitoring Officer reported on a request that had been received from a neighbouring local authority for nominations for membership of an appeals panel. Two members of the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel and the Chairman had offered their services and the Monitoring Officer was currently seeking expressions of interest from elected Members.

SC/27 **STANDARDS COMMITTEE REPORTS AND DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION**

The list was noted.

SC/28 **REPORT BY PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Horsham Association of Local Councils would be held in Steyning on 25th January 2010.

SC/29 **REPORT BY MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES IN ENGLAND (AIMSCE)**

It was noted that the next meeting of the AIMSCE would be held in Horsham on 17th March 2010.

SC/30 **ETHICAL FRAMEWORK UPDATE**

The Monitoring Officer reported on developments in the ethical framework that affected the role and activities of Councillors and the Council's business, including:

- Standards for England Bulletin 46: contained useful guidance on bias and pre-determination.
- Training and awareness: Training for all Members on the new Code of Members' Conduct would be devised when the Code became available. The new DVD on Local Assessment from Standards for England was to be shown at the end of the meeting and a further viewing would be arranged for those Members not present. Following the viewing, a decision would be made as to whether to purchase additional copies.
- The next Parish Clerks' meeting would be held on 26th January 2010, when arrangements for viewing by Parish Clerks/Chairmen of the Standards for England DVD on local assessments would be discussed.
- Details and statistics relating to local assessment of complaints against Members and local reviews; other action; local investigations and local determinations
- Freedom of Information requests.
- Performance management arrangements
- Management Review update: the new Management Team was now complete.
- Membership of the Committee: An induction session had been held for David Herson, the additional Parish Member on the Committee, and the Monitoring Officer would ensure he received adequate training to assist him with the work of the Committee.
- Consultation on proposed changes to both the Code of Members' Conduct and the Employees' Code of Conduct: it was noted that the revised Members' Code had not yet been received and that further consultation on the introduction of a code for officers was likely to take place in 2010.
- Standards for England Annual Review 2008/09.

SC/30 Ethical Framework Update (cont.)

- Changes to the Adjudication Panel for England.
- A Local Government Ombudsman's case update for October 2009 – January 2010.
- A Standards for England case review for October 2009 – January 2010.
- Members' Bulletin
- Register of Member's Interests. The annual updates had been returned by all Members and were now available to view on the Council's website.
- The Parliamentary Standards Act 2009.
- The Committee on Standards in Public Life.
- The Local Democracy Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, with particular reference to the new duties to promote democratic understanding and to respond to petitions, including electronic petitions. Whilst the Council's Constitution already contained a procedure for the receipt of petitions this would need updating to include reference to electronic petitions.
- Standards for England Memorandum of Understanding with the Audit Commission.
- Governance Toolkit for Parish and Town Councils: the third edition was now available.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

SC/31 WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11 AND FUTURE ANNUAL REPORTS

The Monitoring Officer reported that the production of a work programme was an essential part of the Council's performance monitoring, reporting and planning procedures. The successful delivery of the programme was one of the indicators that enabled an objective judgment to be made on how effective the Committee had been in promoting high ethical standards amongst District and Parish Councils in Horsham and providing appropriate training.

It was therefore recommended that, in accordance with best practice, a formal work programme should be agreed for 2010 rather than being subsumed in the Monitoring Officer's regular Ethical Update reports.

A suggested work programme for 2010/11 was submitted, incorporating the key responsibilities of the Standards Committee including previous known responsibilities and additional matters that had been added through the local assessment regime and the new strategic regulator role of Standards for England. The list also included matters incorporated in the oral annual report that had been made to Council in December 2009. It was intended that the

SC/31 Work Programme 2010/11 and Future Annual Reports (cont.)

Ethical Update Report, which was made to each meeting of the Committee, would include details on how the Committee was progressing in achieving its work programme and any changes required.

Members discussed the proposed work programme and made suggestions in respect of its presentation and content, including ways of promoting the role and work of the Committee. It was also suggested that the Committee should hold an awayday/workshop session to enable informal/in-depth discussion of relevant issues. This would be investigated.

Whilst the Chairman of the Committee currently presented an oral annual report to Council at the end of each calendar year on the work undertaken by the Committee and future developments, best practice indicated that the annual report should be produced in a written format. It was therefore proposed that work should commence on the Committee's first written annual report for Council for 2010/11.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the draft work programme for the next year be noted.
- (ii) That the Monitoring Officer be authorised to finalise the programme in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee.
- (iii) That, in future, an Annual Report be presented to Council orally by the Chairman of the Committee and that it be circulated subsequently in written format, commencing in 2010/11.

REASONS

- (i) To comply with best practice.
- (ii) To enable objective judgment to be made on how effective the Committee has been.

SC/32 **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent matters to be considered.

The meeting finished at 12.05pm having commenced at 10.13am.

CHAIRMAN