

MINUTES OF: MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 12th March 2008

**PRESENT: Mr A Neville (Chair)
Councillors A Barnes, Cheetham, Forshaw, J Pawson and Thorne
Mr A Nixon, Independent Member
Mr F B Divine, Independent Member**

**IN ATTENDANCE: Bill Lawley, Interim Legal and Democratic Services Manager
Jenni Cook, Committee Officer**

**ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Essex
1 member of the public**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Whitworth Town Council representative, Councillor Grogan.

2. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 22nd January 2008 be agreed as a correct record.

5. CHAIR'S UPDATE

Councillor Hancock

The Chair noted the resignation of Councillor David Hancock and requested that the Committee send a letter of thanks to Councillor Hancock for his valuable contributions during his time on the Standards Committee.

The Chair provided an update on the actions since the last meeting of the Committee as summarised below.

Whistle Blowing Policy

It was noted that there had been no reported use of the Whistle Blowing Policy since the previous meeting.

Consultation on the Checklist for Local Assessments

The Chair confirmed that a working group had been set up, comprising of himself, the Portfolio Holder for a Well Managed Council and Councillor Amanda Robertson, and a response to the Standards Board's Consultation with respect to the Checklist for Local Assessments had been submitted. A copy of the response was circulated. The Chair noted that due to the high number of responses received by the Standards Board, introduction of any new policy had been postponed to 1st May 2008. It was noted the Standards Board had dismantled its investigation team and during the interim period, a backlog of complaints might build up.

Gully Cleaning

The Chair informed Members that the Lancashire County Council representative had responded to the Minutes of the previous meeting, stating that the issue of gully cleaning was being raised at the Neighbourhood Forums and Lancashire Local meetings. It was agreed that this matter would be deferred until responses from the Neighbourhood Forums and Lancashire Local meetings had been received by the Chair.

Resolved:

That the Lancashire County Council representative be asked to send responses from the Neighbourhood Forums and Lancashire Local meetings with an indication of a timetable to the Chair.

Annual Report of the Standards Committee

The Chair outlined an Annual Report which described works carried out by the Standards Committee during 2007/2008. The Chair noted that the work programme set by the Standards Committee at the start of the Municipal Year was almost completed. This Report would be sent to Full Council on 26th March 2008.

Resolved:

That the Standards Committee Annual Report 2007/2008 be sent to Full Council.

6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions were raised under this item.

7. VERBAL UPDATE ON THE INDEPENDENT MEMBERS FORUM

The Chair and Mr F B Divine reported that they had attended Independent Members Forums. Discussion took place on the effectiveness of the Forums. Mr Divine noted that the Forum he had attended was not participative, however, some of the Forums and Conferences attended had been useful.

The Chair informed the Committee that a pilot study of complaints had been carried out by other Councils and consideration was being given to using the content of the pilot study as the basis of a training session for Standards Committee Members to assist with understanding of the new arrangements for determination of complaints. It was noted that an increase in the number of Parish Council representatives was necessary.

Resolved:

That the Chief Executive be informed that the number of Parish Council representatives needed to be increased.

8. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Interim Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented a report which updated Members on corporate governance arrangements within the Council. The report advised Members of recommended actions in relation to the current corporate governance arrangements within the Council.

Members noted that consideration should be given to improved formatting issues for future corporate governance arrangements reports, however, it was agreed that this was an impressive piece of work carried out in a short period of time.

Resolved:

That the Review of Corporate Governance Arrangements be agreed.

9. COMPLIANCE WITH THE MEMBER DEVELOPMENT LEARNING STRATEGY

The Interim Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report of the Committee and Member Services Manager which advised Members of compliance with the Member Development and Learning Strategy 2007/08 which was agreed at Full Council on 27th June 2007. Within the Strategy it was noted that there was an expectation that Councillors would attend a minimum of 5 training sessions per annum. It was noted that evidence had been collected to suggest that 16 Councillors had failed to attend the minimum number of training sessions over the last 12 months. It was noted that further training sessions were arranged and Members were encouraged to attend these sessions.

Discussion took place on the report and it was agreed that further information was required:

- Number of courses held in 2007/08
- Number of new Councillors/By-Elections
- Number of attendees at sessions and start times.
- Has one-to-one training and training other than that provided in the Member Training Schedule been included in the figures?
- What feedback has been received from the Member Development Working Group?
- Breakdown of which courses each individual Member has attended.

Resolved:

1. That the report be reconsidered once the information detailed above had been considered.
2. That the Member Development Working Group would be asked to consider the issue of compliance with the Member Development Learning Strategy.

10. MINUTES OF THE AUDIT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Audit Scrutiny Committee held on 7th February 2008 be noted.

**11. STANDARDS BULLETIN NUMBER 37 – FEBRUARY 2008
REGULATORY SERVICES MEMBERS BULLETIN NUMBER 6**

The Standards Board Bulletin Number 37 was discussed and it was noted that further consideration was being given to the Standards section on the Council's website.

The Regulatory Services Members Bulletin Number 6 was outlined and briefly discussed.

Resolved:

That the Bulletins be noted.

12. PROBITY IN PLANNING TRAINING

The Chair informed members that the Audit Commission place high importance on compliance with the Planning Code of Conduct and that Probity in Planning training was planned. It was noted that this was part of the Standards Committee's work plan.

Resolved:

That the verbal report be noted.

13. REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COUNCIL'S ANTI-FRAUD AND ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY

The Chair outlined the report of the Benefit Investigation Unit which informed Members of work carried out and proposed improvements to the Benefits Investigation Unit during 2008/09.

It was noted by Members that the Government was carrying out an effective benefit fraud awareness campaign.

Resolved:

That the Report be noted

14. UPDATE ON MONITORING OFFICER PROTOCOL

The Interim Head of Legal and Democratic Services provided members with an update on the Monitoring Officer Protocol which outlined the main functions and responsibilities of the Monitoring Officer. It was noted that consideration should be given to including the Monitoring Officer Protocol into the Members Handbook.

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That consideration be given to including the Monitoring Officer Protocol in the Members Handbook.

15. WHISTLE BLOWING PROCEDURE

Discussion took place on a draft leaflet which outlined the Whistle Blowing Procedure. The following was suggested:

- Staff be consulted on what they required in a Whistle Blowing Procedure.
- The full Whistle Blowing Procedure be brought to the next meeting.
- Authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Regulatory Services and the Chair to decide on the content of the leaflet.

Resolved:

1. That the Executive Director of Regulatory Services and the Chair decide upon the content of the leaflet.
2. That the Whistle Blowing Procedure be brought to the next meeting of the Standards Committee.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and finished at 8.10pm)