

MINUTES OF: MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 9th December 2008

**PRESENT: Mr A Neville, Independent Member (Chairman)
Councillors Aldred, A Barnes, Cheetham, May (substituting for
Councillor Sandiford), Morris and H Steen
Councillor Grogan, Whitworth Town Council**

**IN ATTENDANCE: Linda Fisher, Executive Director – Business
Emy Aceret, Committee Officer**

ALSO PRESENT: 1 member of the public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr F B Divine, Independent Member, Mr A Nixon, Independent Member, Councillor D Barnes, Whitworth Town Council, Councillor Pilling and Councillor Sandiford (Councillor May substituting).

2. URGENT ITEMS

The Chair reported that there were no urgent items of business.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Resolved:

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

5. CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

An update on actions from the last meeting was provided as set out below:-

- Compliance with the Freedom of Information Policy. The Executive Director – Business reported that the Policy would be presented to Full Council on 10th December 2008 for approval and adoption.

The Chairman reported that the Council had been shortlisted for the Standards and Ethics LGC Awards 2009. He informed the Committee that the Chief Executive, the Executive Director – Business and himself went to London to give a presentation to a panel of three judges. The Executive Director – Business reported that one of the judges was the Minister in 2002 who had knowledge of Rossendale at that time.

The Chairman referred to a request for a copy of our submission from Wakefield Council. In response to a query from a Member, the Chairman reported that the decision would be announced in March 2009. This really was a fantastic achievement and the Committee noted the work that Officers had done in putting together the submission and preparing the presentation. The Chairman referred to the team work. In particular thanks to Heather Moore and Nick Molyneux. The Committee was informed that trust and commitment and team work were words associated by the Chief Executive / Executive Director of Business and the Chair of the Standards Committee to the Council.

Resolved:

That the Chairman's update be noted.

6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Executive Director – Business responded to a question regarding Lancashire Local.

7. STANDARDS BOARD CONFERENCE

The Chairman provided an update on the Standards Board Conference that he had attended in October. He highlighted that the Audit Commission were recommending that Standards Committees should take on a wider remit than dealing with complaints and Rossendale were already doing this.

Resolved:

That the Chairman's report be noted.

8. NORTH WEST INDEPENDENT MEMBERS FORUM

The Chairman provided an update on the North West Independent Member's Forum which he had recently attended with the Vice-Chairman.

The Committee discussed the following items as summarised below:

- Complaints
- Investigations and reports
- Assessments and review
- Hearings
- Decisions
- Confidentiality of information
- Training of Members
- Code of Conduct
- Publicity arrangements of the complaints process and support from the Standards Board

Resolved:

That the Chairman's update be noted.

9. CODES OF CONDUCT FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY MEMBERS AND EMPLOYEES

The Committee considered the draft response prepared by the Chairman. The Executive Director – Business informed the Committee that she would prepare the response on behalf of the Council and she suggested that a Response Group be set up to finalise the reply. She asked the members to contact the Committee Officer if they wanted to participate. It was agreed that the Chairman would join the Response Group.

Resolved:

1. That the Consultation paper be noted.
2. That a reply to the Consultation paper be drafted by a Response Group comprising Members of the Standards Committee and Officers.

10. REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The Executive Director – Business provided an update on the Assessment Criteria which had been introduced to deal with complaints made under the Code. She informed the Committee that the process was working well. The Standards Board provided a set of model letters for every stage of the process.

In considering the matter, the following items were discussed:-

- Assessment procedures
- Training

Resolved:

That the update be noted.

11. OBSERVING STANDARDS COMMITTEES

The Executive Director – Business suggested that another way to improve standards was to visit other Authorities to observe Standards Committees in action.

Resolved:

1. That the suggestion be noted.
2. That Members wishing to visit other Authorities contact Democratic Services Team with ideas.

12. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION

The Executive Director – Business informed the Committee that the report was considered by the Full Council in September 2008.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

13. PROBITY IN PLANNING

The Chairman reported that the Audit Commission Report would be considered by Full Council on 10th December 2008.

In considering the report, the following items were discussed:-

- Training, to also include Whitworth Town Councillors
- Planning Code of Conduct
- Improvements in the Planning Service were noted and Committee commented on the improvements made by both members and officers in making this transformation.

Resolved:

That the Report be noted.

14. USE OF RESOURCES ACTION PLAN

The Chairman discussed the use of resources action plan and in particular considered the governance actions. The Executive Director – Business outlined how the Action Plan related to standards.

Resolved:

That the Action Plan be noted.

15. STANDARDS BULLETIN

The Chairman informed the Committee that the next Bulletin was currently being drafted and a copy would be sent to all Members.

Resolved:

That a copy of the Bulletin be circulated by the Democratic Services Team.

16. WHISTLEBLOWING

The Executive Director – Business reported on arrangements to raise awareness of the Whistleblowing Policy. A leaflet had been circulated highlighting the key points of the Policy.

In discussing the update, the Committee considered confidentiality.

Resolved:

That the update be noted.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 7.45pm)

CHAIRMAN