



MINUTES

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

2.05 p.m. – 3.00 p.m.

15 July 2010

Present: Mr P Franzen (Chair), Mr C Thrower (Vice Chair) and
Councillor Lubbock

Apologies: Councillors Blower, Gihawi and Holmes

1. ATTENDANCE

The Chair expressed concern that, although the meeting was quorate, a number of members were absent. He said that this could be seen as a lack of interest in standards and ethics by the elected members whose role was to champion standards at the Council.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2010.

3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair referred to the media reporting concerning the expenses claimed by members of the Implementation Executive who were appointed to consider preparations for the unitary Norwich Council. He suggested that the Standards Committee might wish to examine this issue at a future meeting, provided that it was included within its remit.

The Solicitor to the Council explained that the order quashing the Norfolk Structural Changes Order came into effect on 5 July 2010. Prior to that, the Council had a legal obligation to make preparations for a Norwich Unitary authority and pay appropriate allowances to members of the Implementation Executive. The Chair said that, in the interests of transparency, it would be appropriate for members to examine the allowances paid. The Vice Chair agreed that it would be an appropriate

issue to consider within the scope of the Standards Committee's responsibility. Councillor Lubbock agreed that, in view of the Committee's aim to increase its profile, it would be appropriate to take a proactive role in reviewing the level of expenses paid to councillors involved in the unitary preparations.

RESOLVED to –

- (1) ask the Scrutiny Officer to provide information on the expenses paid to members of the Implementation Executive to the next meeting;
- (2) consider whether to investigate this issue following receipt of the above report.

4. CASE STUDY – ISSUES ARISING FROM SUSPENSION OF A COUNCILLOR

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the report and referred to the tool kit prepared by the Standards for England for dealing with issues arising from suspension of councillors.

Discussion ensued during which members considered the requirements for a communications policy which would be implemented during cases of this type, and, in particular, to the need for any councillors which had been subject to suspension to be subject to the requirements set out in the protocol. The Solicitor to the Council commented that it would be appropriate to review previous cases to establish the levels of disclosure which would be appropriate within a communications policy.

RESOLVED to –

- (1) ask the Chair and the Monitoring Officer to produce an article raising the profile and promoting the role of the Standards Committee in the Council, and outlining the aims of the Committee for the forthcoming 12 month period;
- (2) ask the Scrutiny Officer, in liaison with the Communications Manager to -
 - (a) prepare a draft communications protocol for consideration at the September meeting of the Committee.
 - (b) arrange a meeting with the Group Leaders and the Chief Executive Officer to secure their support for the communications protocol and promote the idea of publicising the Council's commitment to the principles of public life

5. INCREASING CONFIDENCE IN DEMOCRACY

The Scrutiny Officer presented his report, and answered questions.

During discussion, Councillor Lubbock suggested that the proposals within the report could be implemented during the period of the electoral registration canvass and would help to improve public confidence in the democratic process. She also commented that Standards issues were not considered at the same level within outside bodies on which the Council was represented. The Scrutiny Officer referred

to the likelihood of increased partnership working to deliver services in the future and it would be appropriate for outside bodies to be encouraged to apply the same Standards rules as those applying to the Council.

The Chair expressed concern that there appeared to be no proactive attempt to promote awareness of the 10 principles of public life within the Council's buildings and suggested that awareness within the Council needed to be increased before any campaign to encourage outside bodies to sign up to the campaign. The Vice Chair said that the Standards Committee had only taken a reactive role in the past, and referred to the poor assessment of corporate governance in previous Audit Commission inspections. Councillor Lubbock suggested that the Council's policy on signage had restricted the use of publicity within its buildings.

The Vice Chair then referred to previous Standards conferences at which he had been able to compare the roles of the Standards Committee within various local authorities. He commented that many councils' committees had more regular contact with the political leadership and Chief Executive. He also suggested that more work needed to be done to increase confidence in politicians and local authorities in view of current public perception.

RESOLVED to –

- (1) agree to consider initiatives to develop a '10 principles of public life campaign' at the September meeting;
- (2) ask the Chair and Vice Chair to continue to attend council meetings but that the Lord Mayor be asked to introduce them at the beginning of each meeting;
- (3) ask the Democratic Services Manager to request all the Council's representatives on outside bodies to raise standards issues and the code of conduct at an appropriate meeting of each organisation;
- (4) consider an engagement exercise with community groups and schools at a future meeting.

6. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the draft work programme and the implications for the future role of local Standards Committees in the light of the Coalition Government's policies.

RESOLVED to –

- (1) note the draft work programme;
- (2) ask the Solicitor to the Council to provide members with any further information on the review of the Standards regime when it became available.

CHAIR