

Minutes

Standards Committee

25th March 2010



Independent Representatives	Present
C Webb(Chairman)	Yes
K Harman	Yes
T Jones	Yes
H Paton	Yes
P Schwier	Yes
Parish Representatives	
Councillor W Fossick	Apologies
Councillor S Goodfellow	Yes
Councillor M Phillips	Apologies
District Council Representatives	
Councillor J Finbow	Yes
Councillor M Lynch	Yes
Councillor Lady Newton	Yes
Councillor J O'Reilly Cicconi	Yes

24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

25 **Minutes**

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 10th December 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

26 **Request for Dispensation**

INFORMATION: The Monitoring Officer outlined her report and advised the Standards Committee that there had been amendments to the Regulations to deal with requests for dispensation. The Monitoring Officer advised further that she had received interest and enquiries from Parish Councils for dispensations.

The Monitoring Officer outlined the circumstances in which a request for dispensation would be expected and advised that an application is made by the individual member and not the Parish Council.

The Monitoring Officer advised that there is a need to have a process to deal with requests for dispensations, which could be made at short notice. The process would also include establishing a Sub-Committee to deal with the requests.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the Sub-Committee would need as much time as possible to deal with a request and in the event that it became apparent that there was a need to apply for dispensation at a Parish Council meeting or that insufficient time had not been allowed to make an application for dispensation then the business concerned would have to be deferred until after the application for dispensation had been decided by the Sub-Committee.

DECISION: That:

- (a) the criteria for granting dispensations attached to these minutes be adopted;
- (b) a Dispensation Sub-Committee of the Standards Committee be established to consider requests for dispensations. The Sub-Committee in each case to be drawn from a panel comprising the whole of the membership of the Standards Committee and to comprise a minimum of three Members to include an Independent Member who shall Chair the Sub-Committee, an Elected Member of Braintree District Council and a Parish Representative when the request for dispensation(s) is in respect of or includes a Town or Parish Councillor(s); and
- (c) the quorum for the Dispensation Sub-Committee shall be 3 Members.

27 Ethical Governance Action Plan

INFORMATION: The Monitoring Officer outlined her report and advised the Standards Committee that there was evidence that the Members of Braintree District Council had a good understanding of the Standards Committee and the action to be taken on interests.

The Monitoring Officer outlined the 3 action points of the Ethical Governance Action Plan and a discussion followed in respect of continuing to raise the profile of the Standards Committee, contact and communication methods with the Parish Councils and continuing training on the Code of Conduct.

Action Point: the Monitoring Officer to amend the second action point of the Ethical Governance Action Plan by inserting the word “easy” so that the action point states:-

“Review contents of website to ensure that information on the Standards Committee and the Code of Conduct exists in only one place and is easy to find”

DECISION: The Ethical Governance Action Plan be agreed

28 Standards Committee Annual Report

INFORMATION: The Monitoring Officer introduced the draft Annual Report and advise the Committee that she has met with the Chairman of the Standards Committee to consider style and contents of the Annual Report with a view to encourage people to read it. The Monitoring Officer advised that the draft report gave a sense of the message which the Chairman and she were trying to achieve and welcomed the comments of the Committee.

The Monitoring Officer outlined each section of the draft report and advised that photographs of the individual members of the Sub-Committee would be included to enable the reader to identify and relate to the Committee.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the “TLC” graphic was a suggestion following discussion with the Chairman. At the Annual Conference, Standards for England had a logo “serious about standards”, but this was considered to be too harsh for the Standards Committee’s Annual Report.

The Monitoring Officer asked the Committee to consider the contents of the draft report and let her have any comments by the end of business on Monday 28th March 2010, so that the report is ready to be presented to Full Council on 12th April 2010.

The Standards Committee discussed the contents of the draft report and considered that the “new look” of the annual report was a good idea and considered it to be user friendly, particularly with the use of graphics. The Committee was concerned with the “TLC” strap line and how that may be interpreted and wished to see an alternative or it removed.

The Committee made comments regarding the individual photos and the lack of details of the independent Members and the Parish Representatives. The Monitoring Officer advised that photos could be replaced and details of the independent Members and the Parish Representatives would be included.

The Standards Committee welcomed in the inclusion of statistics showing the number of complaints received by the Standards Committee as it showed trends in complaints and would be useful as a comparison tool for the future.

The Standards Committee also considered attendance at the Roadshows and the Annual Assembly together with the in house training should be included as this would make the public aware that the Standards Committee takes the matter of standards seriously.

Action points for Monitoring Officer:

1. Include the names of the Members of the Standards Committee;
2. to put in bold, the number of complaints the Standards Committee has received in the last 12 months;
3. Amend the scale of the table for the outcomes of complaints received;
4. remove strap line "TLC" and replace with suitable alternative;
5. include photos of the Monitoring Officer and the Duty Monitoring Officer

DECISION: Subject to further comments of the Standards Committee to be received by the Monitoring Officer by 28th March 2010, the Annual report is approved

29 Annual Assembly 2010 (18-19 October 2010)

INFORMATION: The Monitoring Officer advised the Standards Committee that she had received information on the Annual Assembly. In looking at the sessions, the Annual Assembly would be covering matters which the Standards Committee has already done or will be doing in the next 12 months.

The Monitoring Officer advised that there have been no major changes in the last 12 months, and that a large element of the Assembly was in respect of the Standard for England, which could be subject to change following the General Election in May 2010. Consequently, the Monitoring Officer advised that she would not recommend an officer to attend, but would leave it to the Committee to decide whether they wish for a Member to attend.

The Committee was advised that the cost of Annual Assembly was £450 plus VAT per delegate plus travelling and accommodation costs.

The Chairman and the Monitoring Officer considered it right not to incur expenses, where the Assembly was not covering essential or providing new information.

DECISION: The Standard Committee agreed not to send delegates to the Annual Assembly for 2010.

30 Independent Members Forum

INFORMATION: The Monitoring Officer provided an oral report and advised the Committee that following her attendance at a meeting with other Monitoring Officers she had put this item on the agenda for discussion.

The Monitoring Officer advised that last time the Independent Member Forum was raised the Independent Members didn't consider there to be any benefit in attending the forum. However, at the Meeting of the Monitoring Officers, the Monitoring Officer received positive feedback and decided to bring it to the Committee's attention.

The Monitoring Officer advised that forum was purely for the Independent Members to enable them to exchange experiences. No officers attended the forum and that the venue would circulate around Essex.

The Committee stated when this was raised previously, it was stressed that the point of being an independent member was being neutral and there was a need to remain independent and could see no reason why there was a need for a forum.

The Chairman advised the Committee that at present there was no invitation to attend the forum, and the forum may now be different. The Chairman advised further that if the Committee wished, the Monitoring Officer would find out further information and circulate it to the Independent Members.

DECISION: The Standards Committee agreed that there was no need for the Independent Members to attend the forum at this stage, but the Monitoring Officer to receive and circulate information to the independent members.

31 Meetings of the Standards Committee

INFORMATION: The Monitoring Officer advised that the Council's Programme of Meetings had been set and circulated the dates of the Standards Committee for the Civic Year 2010/11. The Monitoring Officer reminded the Standards Committee that the dates have been arranged for a Thursday commencing at 7.15pm, as this was the most convenient day for the Committee's members.

The dates circulated by the Monitoring Officer were:

17th June 2010,
30th September 2010,
25th November 2010, and
17th March 2011.

DECISION: The Standards Committee received and agreed the Standard Committee dates for the Civic year 2010/11.

32 Parish Representatives Councillor William Fossick and Councillor Stephen Goodfellow

INFORMATION: It was noted that Parish Representatives, Councillor William Fossick and Councillor Stephen Goodfellow would be standing down at the end of March 2010 from the Standards Committee following the completion of their 2 terms as Members of the Standards Committee to the Committee. The Chairman and the Members of the Standards Committee wished to express their thanks to for all their efforts and contributions

32 Date of Next Meeting

INFORMATION: The next meeting of the Standards Committee will be held on Thursday 17th June 2010 at 7.15pm at Braintree District Council Offices, Causeway House, Bocking End

The meeting closed at 8.23pm

Chris Webb
Chairman