

MINUTES of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 4 March 2010

- Present:** Cllr Mrs D Revell; Cllr M Revell; Cllr Y Gupta; Cllr J Kent;
Cllr M Canavon
- Apologies:** Cllr E Hardiman; John Peters
- In attendance:** Mr Michael Carpenter (Chair); Mr Brian Little (Deputy Chair); Mr Akintunde Oluwaleimu; Mr Terry Webb and Ms Karen Boyles
- Julie Harris, Principal Democratic Services Officer
Tasnim Shawkat, Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal Services
-

Before the meeting formally started, the Committee watched a training DVD, published by 'Standards for England' entitled: '*Assessments Made Clear*'.

50. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Committee held on 21 January 2010 were approved as a correct record.

51. MATTERS ARISING

- 51.1 Councillor Revell mentioned how much she had enjoyed the recent visit to Kent County Council and asked if they could be thanked for their hospitality.
- 51.2 In respect of the Standards Committee Annual Report, the Monitoring Officer would circulate this to all members for their comments. The Report would then come back to the Committee in April, ahead of being presented to Annual Council in May.
- 51.3 The Head of the Executive Office advised that 2 places had been booked for the Standards Committee Annual Conference in October 2010. Members agreed that delegates be nominated after the elections. The Chair commented that he had previously attended this conference and found it very beneficial.

52. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

There were no such items.

53. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations.

54. ETHICAL GOVERNANCE AUDIT

- 54.1 The Monitoring Officer presented this report, which had been fully endorsed by the Portfolio Holder and recommended that an audit be undertaken of the Council's ethical standards. The Audit would be part of the External Audit Plan and would therefore carry no further financial implications for the Council. The primary benefit would be for the Council to have an independent assessment of the arrangements in place for ethical governance, to enable it to reach the highest possible standards.
- 54.2 Members suggested that, under paragraph 3.2 of the report, a further example of good practice be added in that the Chair and Vice Chairs (of Standards) regularly attend full Council. Members suggested that their presence be announced by the Mayor at every meeting, for the benefit of members of the public.
- 54.3 In response to Members' questions, the Monitoring officer advised that, once the Audit had been completed, the Standards Committee would be able to carry out their own annual internal assessment. Further detail as to the exact nature of the Audit would be worked up by the Monitoring Officer and reported back to the June meeting. Members noted that, as part of the Audit, a survey would be undertaken of either a selection of members or possibly all them, in order to gauge their perceptions of the benefits (or disbenefits) of the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED

- 1. That an ethical governance audit be undertaken, using the diagnostic tool prepared by the Audit Commission, during the Financial Year 2010/11.**
- 2. That the requirement to comment on any aspect of the proposed audit (and suggestions as to areas to be covered) be noted.**

55. STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

- 55.1 At its last meeting, Members of the Standards Committee suggested items for its work programme for the Municipal Year 2010/11. The Monitoring officer had worked these up into a draft timetable, which was now before the Committee for approval. The draft timetable had a provision for 8 meetings throughout the year, with 2 informal workshops.
- 55.2 Members generally felt that this amount of meetings might be a little excessive, as they could always convene an extra meeting if and when required. The Monitoring officer also suggested a fresh approach whereby members be involved in report writing and that this be the topic of a workshop discussion.

- 55.3 There was unanimous agreement for a standing item, on each agenda, to give anonymous feedback on the outcome of initial assessments. Members also suggested that there be an annual review of cases, with lessons learnt and feedback from the councillors concerned as to whether the Initial Assessment process had supported and helped them.
- 55.4 In respect of new councillors, the Monitoring Officer advised that the Committee would be able to contribute to the new Member Induction Pack at the next meeting. There was also some discussion about valuing and including lay members and it was suggested that they be invited to full Council in May, with an opportunity to meet the Mayor and Leader of the Council either before or after the formal meeting.
- 55.5 Members voted (6 for and 4 against) to opt for 6 meetings a year, with 2 workshops. The Monitoring Officer advised that she would adjust the workplan accordingly and that this would appear as a standing item on each agenda, in order for its content to be reviewed as necessary.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Committee schedule 6 meetings for the Municipal Year 2010/11, with 2 informal workshops.**
- 2. That the Monitoring Officer revise the draft workplan accordingly.**
- 3. That the Committee's workplan be a standing item on the Agenda for the Standards Committee, subject to regular reviews, in order to discharge its business.**

The meeting finished at 8.15 p.m.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Julie Harris, telephone (01375) 652021,
or alternatively e-mail jaharris@thurrock.gov.uk**