

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

5 MARCH 2010

Present :- Mr D. Coe (Independent Member) Chairman
Mr Andrews (Independent Member)
Mr Bartier (Parish Council Representative)
Mrs Brown (Parish Council Representative)
Councillor Chapman
Ms Eden (Parish Council Representative)
Mr Farmer (Independent Member)
Mr Fitton (Deputy Chairman) (Independent Member)
Councillor Lewis
Mr Roberts-Mee (Independent Member)

18. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2009 were confirmed as a correct record.

19. Standards Committee Annual Report 2009/10

The Committee considered a report from the Monitoring Officer presenting a draft Standards Committee Annual Report for 2009/2010. The Monitoring Officer explained that draft would be updated before submission to Council to take account of the Committee's activities to the end of March 2010.

Two independent members of the Standards Committee had been invited to sit on Suffolk County Council's Allegations Sub-Committee. The Committee requested that reference to the help provided to Suffolk County Council be included in the report as this reflected well on the expertise and reputation of the Committee. At section 3 reference should also be made to the proposals to increase the membership of Borough Councillors on the Committee. It was also agreed that statistical information about the numbers of Parish Councillors who had attended training sessions organised by the Monitoring Officer should be included at section 5.4 of the report.

The Committee expressed its thanks to the Monitoring Officer for the high quality of the support and advice it received and asked that the final paragraph of section 3 be amended accordingly.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2009/2010 be approved subject to the amendments above;

(b) the Monitoring Officer be authorised, in consultation with the Chairman, to make any necessary changes to the Annual Report to give effect to the Committee's activities up to the end of March 2010.

20. Review of Local Code of Corporate Governance

The Committee considered a report from the Monitoring Officer reviewing the updated Local Code of Corporate Governance.

The Committee noted the updates to the Local Code of Corporate Governance and that a number of new documents had been included in the Code. For example the Partnership Strategy and Register, the Safeguarding Children Policy and Single Equality Scheme had now been approved and were now included. These inclusions strengthened the Code. The Committee also welcomed the reference to the Annual Reviews of the Whistle Blowing Policy and Gifts Hospitality and the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy which it had requested.

RESOLVED that the contents of the updated Local Code of Corporate Governance be noted.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the updated Local Code of Conduct be approved.

21. Review of Standards Committee Composition

The Committee considered a report from the Monitoring Officer recommending that the number of Borough Councillors on the Committee be increased to four.

The need to increase the Borough Councillor representation on the Committee had arisen as there had been occasions when potential difficulties had occurred in arranging for Borough Councillor representation on a particular Sub-Committee due to work commitments or potential conflicts of interest. These difficulties had not arisen with the Parish representatives or Independent members.

RECOMMENDED to Council that the number of Borough Councillors appointed to the Standards Committee be increased to four and the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make any consequential amendments to the Constitution.

22. Standards Committee Work Programme 2009/10 and 2010/11

The Committee considered a report from the Monitoring Officer setting out progress on the work programme for 2009/10 and proposing a work programme for 2010/2011.

The Committee noted that the work programme for 2009/10 had been complete. The only outstanding items were those where regulations were awaited from central government.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) progress against the work programme for 2009//2010 be noted;
- (b) the work programme for 2010/2011 be agreed.

23. Standards for England Proposals

The Monitoring Officer gave a verbal report on issues relating to the work of the Standards Committee outlined by the Chief Executive of Standards for England at the National Monitoring Officer conference.

The following issues had been raised:-

- The Code of Conduct would not now be reviewed. It was possible that an entirely new Code of Conduct may be issued after the general election.
- Consideration was being given to amending the allegations assessment process as follows:-
 - the decision as to whether a complaint should be investigated to be taken by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chairman of the Standards Committee;
 - the removal of the right of review for complainants where the Allegations Sub-Committee found there had been no breach of the Code of Conduct.
- Standards for England would appoint “relationship managers” who would monitor and supervise the ethical governance work of local authorities.
- Standards for England would be consulting on proposals that it move to a risk based engagement process whereby each local authority would be categorised according to the level of risk it posed to the ethical framework. For example any authority with over 50 parish councils within its area would automatically be categorised as “amber”. This categorisation would feed directly into the Audit Commission’s Use of Resources assessment. The Committee expressed concern about the apparent lack of flexibility in the categorisations and its failure to take account of local circumstances. The consultation paper would be reported to the Committee once it had been received.

RESOLVED that the Monitoring Officer’s comments be noted.

24. Thanks to Retiring Members

The Chairman expressed the Committee’s thanks to Gillian Brown and Sonia Lewis who would be stepping down from the Committee at the end of the Municipal Year.

RESOLVED that the Committee’s thanks to Gillian Brown and Sonia Lewis be noted and recorded.