

STANDARDS COMMITTEE 27 NOVEMBER 2009

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 Gamble
Councillor Lewis
Mr Roberts-Mee (Independent Member)

14. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11 September 2009 were confirmed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:-

(i) In the fourth paragraph of minute 10 the deletion of the word “the” between the words “that” and “whilst”.

(ii) In the final sentence of the first paragraph of minute 12 the deletion of the word “to” between the words “attend” and “these”.

15. Review of Local Assessment of Complaints Against Members

The Committee considered a report from the Monitoring Officer reviewing the introduction of the local assessment process.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and considered that the local assessment process had been introduced very smoothly. The process was working well and the Sub-Committees were gaining experience and becoming more comfortable in their roles. It was noted that one complaint had been right through the process and had resulted in a hearing before the Hearings Sub-Committee. Colchester Borough Council was ahead of many other authorities in the implementation of the process.

The Committee noted that on two occasions the time taken from receipt of a complaint to consideration by the Allegations Sub-Committee had slightly exceeded the target of 20 days set out in the guidance from Standards for England. However, there were mixed messages from Standards for England as to whether the target of 20 days applied to all cases, or was an average.

The Committee thanked the Monitoring Officer for the work and advice he had provided which had ensured that the implementation of the local assessment of complaints had been a success.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

16. Review of Ethical Framework

The Committee considered a report from the Monitoring Officer setting out a revised Ethical Framework. The Monitoring Officer reported that the revised code of conduct was now expected to be issued in 2010.

The Committee noted the revised Ethical Framework. The Committee asked that it be provided with an annual report on the Whistle Blowing Policy. This would be provided along with the report on the gifts and hospitality register. It was noted that the Standards Committee was not mentioned in the Media Protocol. The Monitoring Officer would liaise with the Council's Communications Team on this issue. The Monitoring Officer would also address some minor inconsistencies in the cross-referencing in the documentation.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) The revised ethical framework be approved.

(b) The Standards Committee receive an annual report on the Whistle-Blowing policy alongside the report on the gifts and hospitality register.

17. Revised Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy

The Committee considered a report from the Head of Resource Management presenting a revised anti-fraud and corruption policy and recommending it be referred to Council for inclusion in the Council's Policy Framework. Hayley McGrath, Risk and Resilience Manager, attended to assist the Committee.

The most significant change in the update of the policy was the incorporation of the Benefits Sanction Policy, which was previously reported separately. The Committee noted that there would continue to be a separate process for investigating benefit fraud. The new policy also set out the Council's culture and values and demonstrated that fraudulent and corrupt actions would not be tolerated. It also gave guidance on how an issue would be investigated to ensure that there was a consistent approach to managing fraud and corruption.

RESOLVED that the revised Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy be agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Council that the revised Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy be included in the Council's Policy Framework.