

Standards Committee – Meeting held on Wednesday, 7th October, 2009.

Present:-

Co-opted Independent Members:-

The Reverend Paul Lipscomb (Chair) and Mr Mike Field

Elected Members:-

Councillors Hewitt, Maclsaac and Mann

Parish Councillor Representatives:-

Parish Councillor Nicoline Brandligt, Parish Councillor Dalip Rajput and Parish Councillor Laurie Tucker

Apologies for Absence:- Mr Fred Ashmore, Dr Henna Khan, Councillors P Choudhry and Qureshi

PART I

9. Declarations of Interest

None.

10. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 13th July, 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

11. Members' Performance Monitoring - Attendance Record 2008/2009

In accordance with the instructions of the Council at its meeting on 26th April, 2006 a record of elected Members' attendance at council, committee, sub-committee, panel and outside bodies meetings and member training sessions during the municipal year 2008/09 were submitted for consideration. As previously requested by the Standards Committee, a separate report on elected and co-opted Members' attendance at meetings of the Standards Committee during the same period was also submitted.

During the presentation of the report, the Chair drew attention to the fact that publication of the information gave an opportunity for members of the public to see and judge how their Members performed in this area of their work as a councillor.

Concern was expressed that in some instances members had valid reasons for non-attendance at meetings and the Committee considered ways in which this could be reflected in future reports. The Member Services Manager suggested that, Members who, during the year under review, had experienced exceptional circumstances which accounted for a significant number of absences could be invited to explain the reason for their attendance record

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and a footnote to that effect could be added to the Report. The Committee accepted that on practical grounds explanatory notes could only be allowed in exceptional circumstances as the reporting of reasons for individual absences would be impracticable.

A Member drew attention to the generally poor attendance record of Members at compulsory training sessions and suggested that this might be due in some part to sessions being arranged at short notice and coinciding with other meetings. The problem of meeting dates coinciding with other commitments was also raised in respect of meetings of outside bodies.

The Member Services Manager indicated that as far as was possible all compulsory training for 2010/2011 was to be incorporated into the Council's corporate meeting diary which was to be submitted to Council for approval in November. This would give Members advance warning of all training dates and hopefully outside bodies, particularly local ones, would have some regard to the calendar of meetings when fixing their meeting dates. Another recent measure introduced to help improve Member attendance had been to offer two alternative dates for the same training session in the hope that Members would be able to attend one of them and would not be penalised for non-attendance at the other. This approach could be adopted in respect of training sessions which were subsequently added to the approved Calendar of Meetings.

A Member suggested that in addition to the current annual performance monitoring report, each committee, sub-committee or panel should receive annually a report on the attendance of its Members. There was some discussion on how this suggestion would work in practice and the Member Services Manager was asked to report back with possible proposals on this matter to the Committee's next meeting.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Members' attendance records for 2008/2009 now submitted be noted.
- (b) That a report formalizing the proposals outlined above and providing suggestions on how the attendance reports for individual Committees etc could work in practice be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

12. Standards Committee (Further Provisions) England Regulations 2009

The Borough Secretary and Solicitor submitted a report summarising the Standards Committee (Further Provisions) England Regulations 2009 which had come into force on 15th June.

The Regulations set out new provisions relating to the initial assessment of complaints; new rules about dispensations in certain circumstances where Members had a personal and prejudicial interest and gave local authorities

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the option to set up Joint Standards Committees to discharge all or some of the standards' functions in Part III of the Local Government Act 2000.

The Regulations relating to the initial assessment of complaints enabled the Standards Board for England (SBE) to suspend the initial assessment functions of local Standards Committees and direct them to refer allegations to the SBE or to the Standards Committee of another local authority in prescribed circumstances. It was not considered that this was likely to occur in Slough as the authority had had no adverse comments from the Board since the standards regime had come into force in 2000.

The subject of all six local authorities in Berkshire setting up a Joint Standards Committee had been discussed by the Berkshire Solicitors' Group which included Monitoring Officer or Deputy Monitoring Officer representatives from each of the six authorities and there was no real enthusiasm to set up any such joint committee.

By law, members wishing to apply for a dispensation were required to submit an application in writing for consideration by the Standards Committee. It was up to the Committee to decide whether or not a dispensation should be granted and what criteria should be applied when considering such a request. The Borough Secretary and Solicitor indicated that such criteria were currently being drafted with a view to them being submitted to the next meeting of the Committee for consideration.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the criteria to be applied in considering Member dispensation requests be submitted to the next meeting of the Standards Committee for consideration.

13. Standards Committee Work Programme 2009/2010

The Officers submitted for consideration the Committee's revised work programme for the Committee for 2009/2010.

The Committee was advised that training on revisions to the Local Code of Conduct and Members' obligations and responsibilities as representatives of the Council on Outside Bodies, originally scheduled to be held before the end of November 2009, had not yet been arranged as publication of new regulations by the Government was still awaited.

Consideration of the new national Code of Conduct for Employees had also been deferred as publication of the Code by the Government was also still awaited. In the revised work programme submitted consideration of this Code had been scheduled for the Committee's meeting in March 2010 in the hope that the new Code would be published by that date. However, there was no

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certainty that this would happen and the matter might have to be deferred yet again.

Resolved – That the current work programme for 2009/2010 now submitted be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.00 pm)