

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Standards Committee**
held on Tuesday, 25th November, 2008 at Council Chamber, Municipal
Buildings, Earle Street, Crewe CW1 2BJ

PRESENT

Mr N Briers (Chairman)
Mr D Sayer (Vice Chairman)

Councillors Mrs R Bailey, B Dykes, J Goddard, J Hammond, Mrs M Martin,
M Parsons and Mrs L Smetham

Independent Members Mr Ian Clark, Mr M Garratt and Mr R Pomlett

18 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED:

That Mr Nigel Briers be appointed Chairman of the Committee.

19 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED:

That Mr David Sayer be appointed Vice Chairman of the Committee.

20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor Mrs M Hollins.

21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

22 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public present who wished to address the Committee.

23 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

That the minutes be approved as a correct record subject to the inclusion of an Apology for Absence from Councillor Mrs M Martin.

24 RECRUITMENT PROCESS FOR PARISH COUNCIL STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Committee considered a report on the recruitment process for Parish Council representation on the Standards Committee.

The Shadow Council had decided that the Committee's membership would include 3 Parish Council Members and a recruitment exercise had taken place through the Cheshire Association of Local Councils (CHALC). An agreed Job Description and Person Specification had been sent to CHALC who had received five applications in response to the recruitment exercise. A Panel comprising Executive Representatives from the Cheshire East area had been convened to consider the applications and recommend three applicants –

- Councillor Teresa Eatough –Weston and Basford Parish Council;
- Councillor Kenneth Edwards – Bollington Parish Council;
- Councillor Patricia Barnett – Twemlow Parish Council.

Each Councillor was currently a Member of the relevant Borough Council's Standards Committee. The two remaining candidates' names would be retained by CHALC as reserves in case the proposed Parish Councillors were unable to undertake the role. The Parish Council representatives must be present if the Committee was discussing Parish issues.

RESOLVED:

That Council be advised to approve the appointment of the following three Parish Councillors as Parish Council representatives on the Standards Committee:

- Councillor Teresa Eatough;
- Councillor Kenneth Edwards;
- Councillor Patricia Barnett.

25 CODE OF CONDUCT TRAINING FOR NEW CHESHIRE EAST MEMBERS

The Committee considered a report on Code of Conduct Training that had been carried out for new Members. The report outlined that a short training session had been organised as part of the initial induction day attended by most Cheshire East Members on 7 May.

A further training seminar had been arranged for "new" Members – Members who were not currently elected Members of any of the constituent Authorities to which 8 out of the 12 "new" Members had attended. Feedback from this seminar indicated the importance of training on Code of Conduct issues as a number of Members had realised that their Register of Interest forms had not been completed adequately.

Members had also found the training helpful in appreciating the importance of the Code and the consequences of breaching it.

RESOLVED: That

1. the Code of Conduct training carried out for 8 new Members on 27 October and the need for training to be provided for the other 4 new Members, be noted;
2. Code of Conduct training be given to new Members as a matter of priority following their election;
3. new Members be offered individual guidance on the completion of their initial Registration of Interests form; and
4. a specimen Registration of Interests form showing typical entries be developed to assist new Members.

26 WHISTLEBLOWING PROTOCOL

The Committee considered an update report on progress in developing and adopting a Whistleblowing Protocol. It was important for the Council to have such a Policy in place to ensure the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability were embedded in the Council's work. Such a Protocol would provide for a situation in which an employee, Member or contractor witnessed practices that seemed suspicious. The Protocol set out a process by which an individual could report their concerns internally and how the Council would respond.

A proposed Protocol had been considered and endorsed by the Governance and Constitution Committee. However, as the Standards Committee was responsible for promoting high standards of ethical behaviour within the organisation it was appropriate for this Committee to be informed of the development of the Protocol.

A Whistleblowing Protocol was envisaged as being "proper practice" for Local Authority good governance and for meeting the requirements of the Accounts and Audits Regulations 2003 which required a Local Authority to produce an annual governance statement.

RESOLVED: That the report and Protocol be noted.

27 STANDARDS COMMITTEE WEBSITE PRESENCE

The Committee considered a report on introducing a website presence for the Standards Committee. The website was seen as a valuable way of communicating with the public. The report proposed that various details be included on the website including:

- Names of Standards Committee Members including Independent and Parish Members;
- Details about Independent and Parish Member recruitment and their role;
- Complaints form and guidance;
- Information on the Monitoring Officer including their role;
- The Committee's Terms of Reference.

The Standards Board for England had stressed the importance of raising the profile and understanding of the work of Standards Committees.

Members discussed the proposals in the report and ways in which current Local Authorities promoted the work of their Standards Committee including producing leaflets and through Local Democracy Week. It was felt that various media should be used alongside the website.

RESOLVED: That

1. the Standards Committee be promoted on the Cheshire East website with information including:
 - Names of Independent and Parish Members;
 - Details about Independent and Parish Member recruitment and the role they play on the Committee;
 - The Committee's Terms of Reference;
 - A Frequently Asked Questions section giving details about what the Committee does and the powers it has;
 - Information on how complaints against Members can be made including a Complainant Form and Guidance;
 - Information on who the Monitoring Officer is and the role played within the Council;
 - A guide to the Code of Conduct;
 - Information on the Standards Board for England;
 - Useful links to external sources that relate to the Standards Committee;
2. The Interim Monitoring Officer be authorised to organise the relevant web pages and inclusion on the Cheshire East Website;
3. The Interim Monitoring Officer investigate the provision of information about the Standards Committee in a variety of media through liaison with the Communications' Team;
4. The Interim Monitoring Officer develop a procedure for Members of the Standards Committee to use if a direct approach is made;
5. Ways of promoting the Standards Committee be further discussed at the Training Event in February.

28 FEEDBACK FROM THE ANNUAL STANDARDS BOARD CONFERENCE

The Committee considered a report of the Governance Group on the Standards Board Annual Conference held in Birmingham on 13 and 14 October. The conference had been attended by the Interim Monitoring Officer and Councillor John Goddard who was a Member of both Cheshire East Standards Committee and Macclesfield's Standards Committee.

One of the key messages from the conference was the need for Standards Committees to seek to raise the profile of their work both within the organisation and in the public arena. Examples from other Local Authorities included regular meetings held between the Chairman of the Standards Committee and the Leader of the Council.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

29 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a report outlining a draft Work Programme with meetings agreed to take place in January to include an Induction for Independent and Parish representatives prior to a formal meeting, a full day training session for February and a meeting on 10 March to finalise the Annual Report and the Work Programme for 2009-10.

RESOLVED: That the draft Work Programme be approved subject to the programme for the next meeting on Tuesday 13 January to be as follows:

- 9.15am – informal briefing for Independent Members and Parish representatives;
- 10.00 am – Induction for all Members;
- 11.00 am – formal meeting.

30 FUTURE MEETING DATES

The Committee considered future meeting dates for the period January – March 2009.

RESOLVED: That meeting dates be agreed as follows – Tuesday 13 January at 11.00 a at Westfields, Sandbach and 10 March 2009 at a time to be confirmed at Westfields, Sandbach.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 10.50 am

Mr N Briers (Chairman)