

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Standards Committee**
held on Monday, 23rd November, 2009 in Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

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

Councillors Rhoda Bailey, J Goddard, J Hammond, M A Hollins, M A Martin,
M Parsons and L Smetham

Independent Members: Mr I Clark, Mr M Garratt and Mr R Pomlett
Parish Council representatives: Mrs P Barnett , Mrs T Eatough and
Mr K Edwards

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr T Leslie Director of Regulation – Standards for England

68 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Member made any declaration of interest in any item of business on the agenda.

69 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

In accordance with Procedure Rules Nos. 11 and 35 a total period of 10 minutes was allocated for members of the public to address the Committee on any matter relevant to its work, or to ask questions.

There were no questions from members of the public and the Committee proceeded to its next business.

70 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21st September 2009 be approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments –

ADD to the list of those present –

- Councillor M Parsons
- Mr R Pomlett (Independent Member)
- Mr M Garratt (Independent Member)

AMEND the designation of Mrs P Barnett from “Independent Member” to “Parish Council representative”.

71 FEEDBACK FROM THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

Mr David Sayer (Vice-Chairman), Councillor Rhoda Bailey and Mrs Teresa Eatough (Parish Council representative) had attended the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees held in Birmingham on 12th and 13th October 2009.

The Vice-Chairman’s report on the Conference was submitted for information.

A number of issues arose during discussion of the report and it was agreed that these be addressed at the Standards Committee “Away-Day” to be held on Friday, 11th December.

RESOLVED:

That the report on the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees, held on 12th and 13th October 2009 be noted.

72 PILOT COMPACT WORKING GROUP

The Committee received for information the notes of the Pilot Compact Working Group meeting held on 29th October 2009 which reported on progress on the development of the Model Compact for use within Cheshire East.

The next meeting of the Working Group would be held at the conclusion of the “Away-Day” on 11th December 2009. It was expected that the Working Group’s final report would be submitted to the Committee meeting on 25th January 2010.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

73 WEBSITE UPDATE

The Council’s website had been re-branded on 1st October 2009 and the following documents had been uploaded –

- Publicity leaflet on the role of the Standards Committee, created by the Publicity Working Group
- Complaints form
- Guidance on Personal and Prejudicial interests (developed by the Publicity Working Group)

It had been reported at the previous meeting that a separate dedicated webpage, entitled "Councillors' Conduct" or similar would be created in a prominent position on the home-page to enable easy access by members of the public. The Committee was now informed that whilst the page had been added to the website, the route was circuitous and not easily accessible. ICT had advised that for technical reasons and in accordance with guidance on hierarchical navigation, the page could not be featured on the home page.

Members considered that all steps should be taken to ensure that the "Councillor Conduct" webpage received greater prominence. The Committee was reminded that it was an Audit Commission requirement for members of the public to be able to access such information with relative ease.

RESOLVED –

That

- (a) the Committee express its concern that, notwithstanding previous efforts, the Council's website did not afford easy and direct access to Standards Committee information, and to the procedure for registering a complaint against a town/parish councillor or a Borough Councillor; and
- (b) that a request be submitted to ICT for a dedicated web-page entitled "Councillor Conduct" to be included on the left-hand navigation pane of the home-page.

74 AWAY-DAY - 11TH DECEMBER 2009

The Chairman reported on arrangements for the "Away-Day" to be held on Friday, 11th December 2009 in the Council Chamber, Municipal Buildings, Crewe. The event would be held between 10.00 am and 1.00 pm.

Jackie Weaver, Chief Officer of the Cheshire Association of Local Councils was expected to be in attendance; Mr Tim Leslie, Director of Regulation, Standards for England would also attend.

The Monitoring Officer of Cheshire West and Chester Council had been invited, along with the Members of the Cheshire West and Chester Standards Committee.

An "expression of interest" form would be e-mailed to Members of the Committee who were asked to make suggestions for topics to be discussed. In addition to Members' suggestions, there were various issues which had arisen at the Annual Conference and these would also be discussed.

75 PARTNERSHIPS PROTOCOL

At the Annual Assembly, the issue of partnership working had been discussed. Standards for England was developing a series of tools which could be used locally to assess and improve local government partnership arrangements.

It had developed a protocol in partnership with Manchester City Council for use by local authorities to encourage high standards of behaviour of those that work in partnerships.

The Committee considered the report of the Monitoring Officer which outlined proposals. It was suggested that a Member and Officer working group be established, to include representation from the Partnership Team. The group would use the draft protocol as a framework for development of a local protocol for use across Cheshire East, reporting back to the Committee in due course.

RESOLVED:

That

- (a) a Working Group of Members and Officers, including the Monitoring Officer and appropriate Officers from the Partnership Team, be established to develop a Partnerships Protocol for use within Cheshire East;
- (b) Councillors M A Hollins and L Smetham, together with Mr R Pomlett be appointed to the Working Group as the Member representation; and
- (c) arrangements be made for a meeting of the Working Group to be held in January 2010 with a view to submitting a report to the Committee's March meeting.

76 STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND - BULLETIN 45 (AUGUST 2009)

The Committee received for information, the Standards for England Bulletin 45 (August 2009).

77 TRAINING FOR MEMBERS

The Committee was invited to consider training needs for Borough Council Members and town and parish councillors.

The new Code of Conduct was not expected to be available until after the Parliamentary election. Notwithstanding this, there was a need for training of both Borough Councillors and town and parish councillors on the Code of Conduct, with particular reference to the declaration of personal and

prejudicial interests which seemed to be the issue which caused the most concern to Members.

It was suggested that two separate sessions be held; one in Crewe and one in Macclesfield. It was further suggested that these should be “twilight” sessions commencing at 6.00 pm, with refreshments provided in an effort to encourage attendance from those councillors who were in employment.

RESOLVED:

That

- (a) two separate training events be arranged in February 2010 on the Code of Conduct; one in Macclesfield and one in Crewe;
- (b) each session be approximately 2 hours duration; and
- (c) at its January 2010 meeting, the Committee discuss the proposed content of the training sessions.

78 CONDUCTING LOCAL ASSESSMENT

At the conclusion of the meeting it had been expected that there would be an opportunity for Members to view a DVD issued by Standards for England. The DVD was scenario-based showing examples of Councillor behaviour which may amount to a breach the Code of Conduct and how an assessment should be carried out.

Owing to technical difficulties with the presentation equipment, it was agreed that this be shown at the next meeting.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 11.45 am

Mr N Briers (Chairman)