

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Standards Committee**
held on Monday, 25th January, 2010 in Committee Suite 1,2 and 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT:

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

Councillors Rhoda Bailey, B H Dykes, J Hammond, M A Hollins, M A Martin,
M Parsons and L Smetham

Parish Council representatives: Mrs P Barnett, Mrs T Eatough and
Mr K Edwards

APOLOGIES: Councillor J Goddard, Mr M Garratt and Mr I Clark

79 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

80 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 members of the public in attendance and the Committee, therefore, proceeded to its next business.

81 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd November 2009 be approved as a correct record.

82 PILOT COMPACT WORKING GROUP

The Vice-Chairman reported that owing to the recent unavailability of the Chief Officer of the Cheshire Association of Local Councils, the Pilot Compact Working Group had not met since 29th October 2009. The Chief Officer had now resumed work and arrangements would be made for a meeting of the Group in the near future.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

83 WEBSITE UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer had reported at the previous meeting, Members had expressed concern that the dedicated webpage "Councillor Conduct" could not be placed more prominently on the Council's website owing to both technical difficulties and the requirement to adhere to guidance on hierarchical navigation.

The Committee had not accepted this and had resolved that a request be submitted to ICT for this page to be included on the left-hand navigation pane of the home page.

Following the Committee's request, ICT had added the "Councillor Conduct" page to the home page listed under "I want to....." in close proximity to the left-hand navigation pane.

Members were satisfied with the changes made and received for information a copy of the home page of the Council's website.

RESOLVED:

That the position be noted.

84 "AWAY-DAY" - 11TH DECEMBER 2009

The Chairman reported on the "Away-Day" held on 11th December 2009. In addition to Members of the Standards Committee, the Vice-Chairman of Cheshire West and Chester Council was also in attendance. The following issues had arisen during the event -

(1) Terms of Reference

It was noted that there was a separate report on the agenda in respect of the Terms of Reference for the Standards Committee.

(2) Planning Training

The issue of planning training for Members had been raised in the context of Members' input into policy development, for example, the Local Development Framework. The Member Training Programme was currently being developed and, if required, arrangements could be made for a session which would focus on this aspect of planning.

In July 2009, Trevor Roberts Associates had delivered an in-house planning session to Members of Cheshire East Council. Although this had principally related to planning enforcement, the topic of general planning

had also been covered. A copy of the programme for the event was submitted for information.

It was reported that on 15th February 2010 Members would be invited to attend an in-house planning training session which would focus on conservation matters, and later in the year a session on development control was planned.

At the conclusion of the March meeting of the Committee, a one-hour planning training session was to be delivered to the non-elected Members.

Each elected Member of the Council had already been provided with a "Development Management Member Pack" and copies of this were now available for non-elected Members of the Committee.

(3) Complaints Form

The complaints form, based on the toolkit provided by Standards for England, had already been up-loaded onto the website and a copy was now submitted to the Committee for consideration

The Chairman had requested the inclusion of this item for review by Members.

Discussion focused on question 3 which related to equality monitoring information. Members were of the view that the question was intrusive and likely to dissuade members of the public from completing the form. It was suggested that the question be removed from the body of the complaints form, and attached as a separate sheet to be marked "optional".

Members also commented that the explanatory notes accompanying the complaints form were couched in language which was complicated.

It was noted that local authorities were under a statutory duty to promote equality. The explanatory notes and the question on equality monitoring had been based on the toolkit provided by Standards for England.

RESOLVED:

That the following changes be made to the complaints form –

- (a) Question 3 be removed from the body of the form, and appended as a separate sheet marked to the effect that its completion was optional; and
- (b) Contact details currently provided on page 5 of the form be repeated in a prominent position on the front page.

85 TRAINING FOR MEMBERS

It was reported that two training sessions for Borough Councillors and town and parish councillors had been arranged on Wednesday, 10th February (Crewe) and Wednesday, 17th February (Macclesfield) respectively. The events would consider matters relating to the Code of Conduct.

Subsequent to these arrangements being made, it had transpired that Standards for England would be submitting its proposals for the new Code of Conduct to Communities and Local Government in the near future. The new Code was not likely to be available until March/April. In view of this development, it was suggested that the training be postponed until the new Code of Conduct had been published.

RESOLVED:

That the two training sessions on the Code of Conduct, to be held in February 2010, be postponed until the new Code of Conduct had been published.

86 TERMS OF REFERENCE - STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the Monitoring Officer's report in respect of the Terms of Reference for the Standards Committee.

The report had been prepared following discussion at the "Away-Day" held on 11th December 2009, at which time the issue of whistle-blowing and anti-bullying had been raised. A copy of the whistle-blowing policy and the anti-bullying policy, styled as the "Dignity at Work" policy were submitted with the report.

Members' discussion focused on the audit function which currently rested with the Governance and Constitution Committee. Members were informed that the Key Lines of Enquiry (the questions which the Audit Commission used to assess local authorities during the Corporate Performance Assessment process) required the establishment of a bespoke Audit Committee. Initial discussions had taken place at Officer level and the Monitoring Officer would be discussing this with the Chairmen of the Governance and Constitution Committee and the Standards Committee. The Democratic Services Manager had been asked to prepare a report which explored the possible division of responsibilities between the two Committees, with particular reference to the audit function.

Reference was made to the "Dignity at Work" policy. Comment was made that this related to the relationship between employees but did not take into account the relations between Members and Officers. It was

suggested that a draft Member/Officer Protocol be prepared for consideration and development.

RESOLVED:

That

- (a) The question of a Member/Officer Protocol be considered at the next meeting; and
- (b) That a report be submitted to the next meeting in respect of the possible division of responsibilities between the Governance and Constitution Committee and the Standards Committee, with particular reference to the audit function.

87 BULLETIN 46 - STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND

The Committee received for information Bulletin No. 46 issued by Standards for England.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the bulletin be noted.

88 CONDUCTING LOCAL ASSESSMENT

Members were able to view a DVD on "Assessment Made Clear". There were some technical difficulties and it was agreed that a replacement copy be acquired from Standards for England and, if possible, a copy for each Member of the Committee, free of charge.

RESOLVED:

That the viewing of the DVD "Assessment Made Clear" be deferred to a later meeting.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 11.45 am

Mr Nigel Briers (Chairman)