

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON TUESDAY, 9 MARCH 2010**

MEMBERS

* Mr M Winterton - Independent Chairman

* Cllr B E Carson

* Cllr J A Westacott MBE

* Mr R Allison (Independent Member)

* Mr C Cox (Parish Representative)

∅ Mr P Dredge (Parish Representative)

* Mr S Dunham (Parish Representative)

* Mr J O'Connell (Independent Representative)

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

Officers in attendance:

All Agenda Items: Monitoring Officer, Member Support Services Manager and Legal Assistant.

Also in attendance:

Cllr M J Howarth

S.35/09 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 15 December 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

S.36/09 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting but none were made.

S.37/09 **JOINT STANDARDS COMMITTEES**

Members considered a report which examined whether to establish a joint Standards Committee with Teignbridge District Council and West Devon Borough Council.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) adopting the 'Review Only' Option. Some Members were of the view that the report could have gone further by recommending a more radical approach to the establishment of a joint Committee. Nonetheless, the Committee did express its in-principle support to adopting the 'Review Only' Option as a starting point;

- (b) the views of Teignbridge District and West Devon Borough Councils. Members were informed that their counterparts at Teignbridge had already recommended the adoption of a 'Review Only' joint Committee, whilst the West Devon Standards Committee was scheduled to consider the matter at its meeting on 15 March 2010. In highlighting the need to closely monitor the progress made by the neighbouring authorities, the Committee also noted the commitment of the Council to the shared services agenda and the likely impact arising from the proposals to establish a fully integrated legal service with West Devon.

RESOLVED

1. That the establishment of a joint Standards Committee, initially for 'The Review Option' (as outlined in the presented report) be approved in principle; and
2. That the Monitoring Officer be instructed to report back to a future Committee meeting on how a joint Standards Committee may be operated.

S.38/09

IMPROVING THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

The Committee considered a report which sought to outline potential suggestions to improve the process by which the Council administered complaints made against Members.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) The Committee was informed that the training sessions, which were taking place in the community for town and parish councils, had been particularly well received. In addition, the presence of a number of town and parish council clerks at these sessions was also welcomed;
- (b) Members agreed that any amendments on the contents of the two 'Frequently Asked Questions' booklets should be sent directly to the Monitoring Officer for incorporation prior to publication of the documents;
- (c) Whilst the two documents contained many similarities, it was felt important that they be kept separate, as they were created from the differing perspectives of a complainant and of a Member who was the subject of a complaint;
- (d) The Committee stressed the importance of receiving interim reports from Investigating Officers who were working on complaints;
- (e) Any Members who were interested in attending the Annual Standards Assembly to be held on 18 and 19 October 2010 were asked to contact the Legal Assistant.

RESOLVED

1. That Members submit any amendments on the contents of the two 'Frequently Asked Questions' booklets to the Monitoring Officer for incorporation as soon as possible; and
2. That any Member who is interested in attending one or two days of the Annual Standards Assembly (to be held in October 2010) contact the Legal Assistant.

S.39/09 TRAINING FOR STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

A report was considered which sought Member agreement to participate as appropriate in the South Hams Member Development Programme.

Members acknowledged the need for a more structured approach to training and development and proceeded to take copies of the current Member Survey in order for them to complete and return the relevant parts to the Council.

In terms of providing training for town and parish councillors, the Committee felt that this was of paramount importance. In addition, Members were invited to become increasingly involved in participating in training sessions and in the design of an appropriate syllabus.

S.40/09 FORWARD PLAN FOR THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE FOR 2009/10 AND 2010/11

The Committee considered its updated Forward Plan and proceeded to make reference to:-

- (a) additions to the Plan. The Committee was advised that the Member Attendance Statistics should be added to the agenda for the meeting on 30 June 2010. Furthermore, the items raised at the last Committee meeting in relation to the website content and the monitoring of Code of Conduct Training would also be considered on 30 June 2010 and an update from the Monitoring Officers' and Chairmen meeting should be programmed on to the Plan for the September 2010 meeting;
- (b) the potential implications arising from the imminent General Election. In terms of forward planning, some Members commented that it was possible that any change in central Government could lead to the cessation of the current Standards for England regime.

RESOLVED

That the draft Forward Plan be approved and adopted, subject to the inclusion of the amendments as detailed above.

S.41/09 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

RESOLVED

That in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business as the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 7(c) of Schedule 12A to the Act is involved.

S.41/09 **COMPLAINTS UPDATE**

Members considered the latest version of the Register of Complaints which had been submitted to the Standards Committee.

In consideration, the Committee was advised that the annual review on 30 June 2010 would highlight the time taken for the determination of each complaint.

(Meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 11.10 am).

Chairman