

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON TUESDAY, 21 JULY 2009**

MEMBERS

* Mr M Winterton - Independent Chairman

∅ Cllr B E Carson

∅ Cllr G Date

* Mr R Allison (Independent Member)

* Mr C Cox (Parish Representative)

∅ Mr P Dredge (Parish Representative)

* Mr S Dunham (Parish Representative)

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

Officers in attendance:

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

Also in attendance:

Cllr M J Hicks

S.13/09 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 16 June 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

S.14/09 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.15/09 LOCAL DETERMINATION OF COMPLAINTS: THE FIRST YEAR

The Committee considered a report which examined the first year of operation of the new local determination procedures. It was noted that the first year of operation of the new complaints system had not been without its challenges, particularly over the length of time some of the cases had taken, but there were opportunities to make improvements on this performance.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) Members were informed that a second update report would be presented to the Committee at its meeting on 22 September 2009;
- (b) Whilst acknowledging that the same opportunities were available to become a Member, the lack of female representation on the Committee was felt to be unfortunate;
- (c) It was intended that a joint meeting of the respective Committee Chairmen and Monitoring Officers of South Hams District, Teignbridge District, and West Devon Borough Councils would be convened in due course. In addition, some further training courses for Members of the Standards Committee were to be organised;

- (d) The unsatisfactory average time taken from the receipt of a complaint to the outcome of an investigation. The Monitoring Officer expressed concern that in the event that the present level of investigations continued, the average time could not be improved upon without the allocation of additional resources;
- (e) To enable for comparisons to be made, it was agreed that information relating to the total number of complaints made during 2007/08 would be circulated;
- (f) The Committee expressed its support at the suggestions to both increase the frequency of meetings scheduled and the establishment of a Hearing Sub-Committee. It was therefore agreed that officers would devise a suggested schedule of panels and present it back to the Committee for consideration at its 22 September 2009 meeting;
- (g) It was requested that all Members be invited to attend the first convened meeting of the Review Sub Committee;
- (h) Concern was expressed at the lack of public awareness with regard to the workings of the Standards Committee. In particular, Members felt that the quasi-judicial function of the Committee required greater explanation to the public. A Member advised that there was a perception amongst the public that the Committee was too cosy with the Council and its elected Members.

RECOMMENDED

1. That Council be **RECOMMENDED** that a Hearing Sub-Committee be established; and
2. That, subject to the approval of such a Hearing Sub-Committee, the Monitoring Officer be requested to devise a new schedule for meeting of sub-committees of this Committee for Assessment, Review and Hearings, in accordance with paragraph 11 of the presented report.

S.16/09

MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE – ANNUAL REVIEW 2008/2009

A report was considered which presented an annual update on the level of Members' attendance at public meetings of the Council for the 2008/09 municipal year.

In light of the recent national press regarding MP's expenses, a lengthy debate ensued during which reference was made to:-

- whether the requirement to attend at least 50% of all meetings to which appointed was a satisfactory target. In recognising the limitation of these figures (e.g. no reference was made to constituent work and attendance at other meetings, such as town and parish councils), the Committee queried whether this target should be revisited. It was concluded that the Chairman would discuss this matter with the Leader of Council and the 50% threshold would be re-considered at the next Committee meeting;
- the public perception of having failed to attend 50% of meetings. The Committee was made aware of the circumstances under which two Members had failed to meet the 50% attendance target. As a consequence, the Committee felt that correspondence should be sent to these Members noting their attendance figures and requesting that they improve in the 2009/10 municipal year;
- a mechanism to report attendance at other meetings. The Committee requested that officers consider potential methods of recording and taking into account attendance at non-Committee meetings (e.g. outside bodies and town and parish council meetings). It was felt that such information would further help to reflect the work of a Member.

In conclusion, the Committee believed the overall attendance statistics to be excellent and wished for its appreciation to be formally recorded.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and the 50% meeting threshold be revisited at 22 September 2009 Committee meeting.

(NOTE: Due to the absence of both Council Members, the meeting was declared inquorate and it was therefore not possible to consider the remaining agenda items.)

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

Chairman