

## Standards Committee

A meeting of Standards Committee was held on Thursday, 22nd October, 2009.

**Present:** Mr F W Hayes(Chairman), Mr M Armstrong(Vice-Chair), Mrs E Chapman (Independent), Cllr Paul Baker, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Terry Laing(vice Cllr Sherris), Mr T Bowman(Parish Representative), Cllr John Fletcher(Substitute Elected Member), Mr C. Nestor(Substitute Independent)

**Officers:** Mr D.E Bond, Mr A. Squires, Miss K. Wannop(LD)

**Also in attendance:** None

**Apologies:** Cllr David Coleman,Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Mr C.V Algie(Parish Representative), Mr R. Mosley(Substitute Parish Representative)

### **S**      **Declarations of Interest**

**59/09**

Cllr J. Fletcher declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in the item no 4 entitled Attendance at Town and Parish Council Meetings as he was a Member of Eaglescliffe and Eggescliffe Council.

### **S**      **Minutes of the Meeting held on 11th September 2009**

**60/09**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2009 were signed by the Chair as a correct record.

### **S**      **Attendance at Town/Parish Council Meetings**

**61/09**

The Committee considered a report that proposed an opportunity for Members' feedback on their attendance at Town/Parish Council Meetings in the Borough.

Eggescliffe and Eaglescliffe Parish Council, 8th October 2009 - attended by Francis Hayes and Tom Bowman.

Members received assessment sheets and responses were agreed for the purposes of feedback to the Parish Council.

RESOLVED that

1. The feedback to be provided to the relevant Town/Parish Council be agreed;
2. Committee Members inform the Council's Monitoring Officer of the meetings/dates which they were able to attend where there were currently no or insufficient nominated attendees. Subject to this, the necessary arrangements would be agreed with the relevant clerks and the Committee Members concerned would be advised which meetings they were being asked to attend.

### **S**      **Observing Council Meetings**

**62/09**

Members considered a report that provided a vehicle for Members' feedback on their attendance at Council meetings to be provided and discussed.

The Committee was asked to contact the Monitoring Officer with details of meetings which they could attend where currently there were no or insufficient

attendees.

RESOLVED that Committee Members inform the Council's Monitoring Officer of the meetings/dates which they were able to attend where there were currently no or insufficient nominated attendees.

**S  
63/09**      **Observing Local Strategic Partnership Meetings**

The Committee considered a report that proposed that Members attend meetings of the Local Strategic Partnership ("LSP") as observers, with a view to reporting back on what they had observed regarding conduct and procedures at the meetings. Explanatory information about the LSP was provided and relevant details of the meetings involved were highlighted.

Committee Members were asked to consider the details and provide an indication of which meetings they were able to attend. Two members would be needed to attend at one of each of the Partnership meetings shown.

RESOLVED that Details of meetings which members were able to attend be provided to the Monitoring Officer.

**S  
64/09**      **Members' and Officers' Interests**

The Committee considered a report that updated Members regarding Members' and Officers' interests.

Members were informed that reminders about updating interests on the Member's register continue to be circulated. The most recent reminder was sent on 23 September 2009. The reminders also covered co-optees and their register details. Revised information was received on a regular basis. Advice about interests continued to be provided before Cabinet and Council meetings and on an ad hoc basis when required. Advice was also provided to Members for the purposes of their roles on outside organisations. Examples were outlined.

The Committee was informed that a (Monitoring Officer) register inspection took place on 18 September 2009 on the Officers' register. Officers were asked to review and update their register details on 28 September 2009.

Members were informed that updates to Town/Parish Council registers were received fairly regular and advice about declarations of interest continued to be provided to Town/Parish Council Clerks when requested or considered necessary. An anonymised example was provided. A reminder to Town/Parish Clerks about ensuring that their councillors continue to update their register details was sent on 23 September 2009.

The Committee were notified that work had been undertaken with relevant Officers to ensure that registration and declaration of interests becomes more embedded in the governance arrangements of partnerships, Renaissance and TVU. Details of progress in this respect and examples of declarations made, would be reported to future meetings of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the information be received.

**S**  
**65/09**

## **Members' and Officers' Gifts and Hospitality**

Members considered a report that provided details of the procedures relating to Members' and Officers' gifts and hospitality and the returns submitted during the second quarter of the year (1 July 2009 - 30 September 2009). The Members' Register had again been reviewed and examples of gifts/hospitality received by Members in the second quarter of the year were provided. Members were last asked to update their register details on 25 September 2009.

Advice was also provided to Members regarding their roles on other organisations. Examples were outlined.

The Committee were informed a further review had been undertaken of the Officers' gifts and hospitality register. Details of the findings were submitted. Since the advice was provided in July about Officers being more circumspect about accepting gifts and hospitality, only 8 returns indicating acceptance had been received. Examples of details submitted during the second quarter of the year were provided. Officers were last reminded about updating their register details on 2 October 2009.

Town/Parish Councils were last asked to ensure that their Councillors provided details of any gifts or hospitality offered/received on 23 September 2009.

The Committee was informed that work had been undertaken with Officers to ensure that gifts and hospitality arrangements become more embedded in the governance arrangements of partnerships, Renaissance and TVU. Details of progress in this respect would be reported to future meetings of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

**S**  
**66/09**

## **Local Democracy Week - 12-18 October 2009**

The Committee was provided with a report that informed Members of the work being undertaken in connection with Local Democracy Week.

Members were informed that traditionally Local Democracy Week was about getting young people more involved with and more aware of their local council. However, with the duty to promote democracy looming under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill, this year's activity had been widened to foster the knowledge of Local Democracy Week and promote the idea of democratic participation at a local level to all. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill (December 2008) intended to create a duty to promote democracy. Central to this legislation would be new rights for citizens to receive more information and influence over local decision-making and the shaping and provision of local services. This would include providing information about how to stand for a civic role. This would require Councils to raise awareness about their work and services so people could:-

- find out and understand how decisions about services that affected them were made;
- how to make their voice heard;
- how to stand for a civic role.

Members requested an update about the Ongoing projects, particularly in relation to mediabox, in a few months time

RESOLVED that

1. the information be noted
2. Members receive an update in a few months on the projects outlined. projects.

**S**  
**67/09**      **Constitution**

Members considered a report that updated the Committee regarding the most recent iteration of the Council's Constitution.

The Constitution had been reviewed and updated since it was last republished (October 2008). The changes had been highlighted in the current version of the Constitution and brought specifically to Members' and Officers' attention. Details of the main amendments were provided to Members, which indicated whether or not approval was required to the changes concerned. As could be seen from the details, most of the revisions reflected previous Cabinet/Council decisions or legislative changes that had occurred. Amendments arising from a Constitutional Arrangements report to the Members Advisory Panel on 14 September were also included. The Committee was asked to note the revisions concerned, particularly where they related directly to the Committee and its responsibilities. All of these revisions had been reported previously to and agreed by the Committee. Council had also now approved the revised constitution as a whole.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

**S**  
**68/09**      **Monitoring Officer Work Programme - 2009/10 - Six Months Progress Report**

Members considered a report that provided the Committee with a six months progress report regarding the Monitoring Officer work programme for 2009/10.

The Monitoring Officer Annual Report for 2008/09 was approved by Council on 9 September 2009 and included a work programme for 2009/10. Members were provided with a schedule containing details of the work programme. The schedule set out the six improvement areas, key actions for each, the target dates for completion, progress, any comments, any necessary remedial action and any revised target dates. Updates to actions proposed which had occurred since the preparation of the report were outlined where appropriate. The Committee was asked to consider/assess progress against the work programme, set out in the schedule. This represented the first six months of work.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

**S**  
**69/09**      **Local Government Ombudsman Complaints 2009/10 - Second Quarter**

The Committee considered a report that provided details of the type and nature of complaints received from and determined by the Ombudsman during the second quarter of 2009/10. In the period 1 July to 30 September 2009, 8 complaints were received from the Local Government Ombudsman. In the same period, 6 complaints were determined and closed by the Ombudsman.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

**S  
70/09**      **Misconduct Allegations - Update**

Members considered a report further to the report to the last meeting (local assessment framework), this report provided an update regarding misconduct allegations received by the Authority.

**Complaints Determined**

A complaint had been received from a member of the public, using the code of conduct for local authority members complaint form. However, it was apparent from the form that the complaint related to the alleged conduct of two Council employees and a private landlord. No alleged misconduct by any local authority members was identified. This was explained to the complainant and it was agreed that the complaint would be dealt with under the Council's corporate complaints procedure. The matter had been investigated under that procedure and a substantive reply had been sent to the complainant.

**Complaints Outstanding**

Two complaints alleging misconduct by Council members have been received. Both had been referred to and considered by the Assessment Sub-Committee. One of the complaints had been referred for local investigation and in relation to the other the Sub-Committee decision had not yet been sent to the relevant member and complainant. The Committee would be kept informed of progress regarding both matters. There were no other allegations currently awaiting assessment.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

**S  
71/09**      **Local Assessment - Case Studies**

Members were asked to consider a case study. The Committee considered and discussed a summary of an investigation report and provided their views on what decisions they would have made.

**S  
72/09**      **Local Assessment Framework**

The Committee was asked to consider the following information regarding the Local Assessment Framework:-

1. Hearings Sub-Committee - Revised Hearing Procedure - this was agreed
2. Revised Local Assessment Criteria - this was agreed.
3. Referral to the Monitoring Officer for other action - Revised Guidance Note -

this was agreed.

4. Weightmans Ethical Standards Clinic - this was discussed/noted

RESOLVED that the information be agreed/noted, as indicated.

**S**  
**73/09**

**Information/Discussion Items**

Members of the Committee considered the following items:-

1. Annual Assembly of Standards Committees - 12/13 October 2009 – The Chair provided a report on some of the key issues raised and discussed at the assembly. He highlighted the following :-

- Standards for England had published its annual review 'local standards; national prospectives' – this contained a Stockton case study.
- Some standards committees were reviewing their arrangements and performance etc.

- The Assembly provided a valuable opportunity to share experiences with other Authorities and their Members.

2. Independent Members Forum - 19 October 2009 – The chair outlined what had been discussed and suggested at the forum. It had been proposed that there should be similar future events and that these should take place within each local authority area.

3. Scrutiny Annual Report - 2008/09 – This was presented and discussed.

4. Member Development – Democratic Services had won the apse service award 2009 for its Members Support System which had been adjudged an innovative approach using technology.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

**S**  
**74/09**

**Standards Committee Forward Plan 2008/2010**

Consideration was given to the updated version of the Standards Committee Forward Plan. Members were again asked to consider whether there were other matters which should be included in the programme for future meetings.

RESOLVED that the Standards Committee Forward Plan be noted/received.