

Standards Committee

A meeting of Standards Committee was held on Friday, 12th March, 2010.

Present: Mr F W Hayes(Independent Chairman), Mr M Armstrong(Independent Vice Chair), Mr C.V Algie(Parish Representative), Mr T Bowman(Parish Representative), Mrs E Chapman(Independent), Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Robert Gibson (Vice Cllr David Coleman), Mr R Mosley(Substitute Parish representative), Mr Chris Nestor(Substitute Independent) Cllr Andrew Sherris

Officers: D.E.Bond, S. Whaley(LD)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr David Coleman

S Declarations of Interest

124/09

There were no declarations of interest.

S Consideration Sub Committee minutes of the meeting held on 25th 125/09 January 2010 and Assessment Sub Committee minutes of the meeting held on 11th February 2010.

Members received the Consideration Sub Committee minutes from the meeting held on 25th January 2010 and the Assessment Sub Committee minutes of the meeting held on 11th February 2010.

S Minutes of the meetings held on 18th December 2009 and 15th January 126/09 2010

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18th December 2009 and 15th January 2010 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

S Observing Council Meetings

127/09

The Committee was made aware that there were no assessment sheets to discuss.

Members were reminded to inform the Monitoring Officer of any outstanding meeting dates which they could attend for Planning Committee as listed in the Appendix to the report.

RESOLVED that Members inform the Monitoring Officer of meeting dates which they could attend.

S Observing Local Strategic Partnership Meetings

128/09

The Committee was made aware that there were no assessment sheets to discuss.

Members were reminded to inform the Monitoring Officer of any outstanding meeting dates which they could attend for Stockton Renaissance as listed in the Appendix to the report.

RESOLVED that Members inform the Monitoring Officer of meeting dates which they could attend.

S
129/09 **Attendance at Town/Parish Council Meetings**

The Committee considered a report that provided a further opportunity for Members' feedback on their attendance at Town/Parish Council Meetings held since the last Committee meeting.

Stillington & Whitton Parish Council held on the 2nd March 2010 which was attended by Cllr John Fletcher and Chris Nestor.

Billingham Town Council held on 16th February 2010 which was attended by Michael Armstrong.

Hilton Parish Council held on the 10th March 2010 which was attended by Tom Bowman and Colin Algie.

Carlton Parish Council held on the 1st March 2010 which was attended by Francis Hayes.

Members agreed that considering observations made by parish representatives who had attended meetings of neighbouring authorities could prove to be awkward, particularly if issues of common interest to those authorities were being discussed, and it was suggested that this should be avoided where possible in the future.

Members received and discussed assessment sheets/comments from the above Parish/Town Council meetings attended and agreed the appropriate feedback.

RESOLVED that

1. Parish representatives avoid observing at neighbouring Parish/Town Council meetings where issues of common interest are likely to be discussed.
2. The information be received
3. Feedback, as discussed, be provided to the relevant clerks.

S
130/09 **The Standards Committee's Annual Report 2009/10**

The Committee received a report that provided an early opportunity for Members to consider the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2009/10.

The Committee agreed that the final content of the report could be determined by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair.

The Monitoring Officer asked Members to pass on any comments they may have regarding the format of the draft report prior to it being finalised.

The report would be presented to the Audit Committee, Cabinet and then to Council for a final decision.

RESOLVED that

1. Members pass on any comments regarding the format of the Standards Committee Annual Report 2009/10 to the Monitoring Officer.
2. The Monitoring Officer finalise the content of the report in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee.
3. The report to be presented to Audit Committee, Cabinet and Council and then be brought back to a future meeting of the Standards Committee.

S
131/09 **The Monitoring Officer's Annual Report 2009/10**

The Committee received a report that provided an early opportunity for Members to consider the Monitoring Officers Annual Report for 2009/10.

The Committee agreed that the usual report format would be appropriate.

The Monitoring Officer asked Members to pass on any comments they may have regarding the draft report prior to it being finalised.

The report would be presented to Audit Committee, Cabinet and then Council for a final decision.

RESOLVED that

1. The Annual Report to be presented in the usual format.
2. Members pass on any comments regarding the Annual Report 2009/10 to the Monitoring Officer.
3. The report to be presented to Audit Committee, Cabinet and then Council.

S
132/09 **Understanding Predetermination and Bias**

Members were presented with a report for consideration providing details of recent guidance and a round up of key points from previous reports regarding predetermination and bias.

The Committee discussed further the key points detailed in the report and considered various practical examples to gain an understanding of predetermination and bias such as in relation to planning applications. It was agreed that the key points would be useful for members and relevant officers when having to consider whether a member might have predetermined a matter.

RESOLVED that

1. The report be noted.
2. The report be drawn to the attention of all Members and relevant Officers as

guidance.

S **Misconduct Allegations - Update**

133/09

The Committee considered a report which provided an update regarding misconduct allegations received by the Authority and detailed the position for the year.

The Monitoring Officer highlighted key areas as detailed below:

1. The Complainant who had made allegations about HM Coroner's Office had in fact been contacted and informed that Stockton on Tees Borough Council did not have jurisdiction over the conduct of HM Coroner's Office Employees. The matter was therefore not referred to an Assessment Sub-Committee meeting.
2. Complaints SBC 12 and SBC 14, (details of which were contained within the report) had in fact been resolved and there were therefore now no outstanding complaints for the year.
3. The total number of complaints received for the year was 4 and only 1 of those required investigation, which had taken significantly less time to complete than previous investigations.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

S **Assessing the Impact of Standards Committees**

134/09

Members were asked to consider the report 'Assessing the Impact of Standards Committees' and determine whether any of the areas of identified notable practice should be explored further.

The Monitoring Officer highlighted some of the key findings from the report, highlighting the following, in particular:

1. Political support is essential for successful Standards Committees requiring leading Members of the authority.
2. The joint training days being held across the Tees Valley for Town and Parish Councils and offered by a partnership of Stockton on Tees, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Redcar & Cleveland and Darlington Councils is seen as notable practice outside the study areas. Leadership is critical, for instance by having leading Members on the Committee. Given the outcomes of the recent viewpoint survey and previous reports, raising the profile of the Committee at Stockton was agreed to be a continuing key priority.

Members were asked to pass any further comments onto the Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED that

1. The report be noted.

2. Members pass on any further comments to the Monitoring Officer.

S Viewpoint 27 - February 2010 - Final Report

135/09

Members were provided with the final report of Viewpoint 27 - February 2010, for consideration.

The Committee discussed the findings contained within the report in respect of which the Monitoring Officer informed Members that the results were not unexpected in relation to the public's awareness of information about the Standards Committee.

The Monitoring Officer also informed Members that a Publicity and Communications programme would be developed for the Committee's consideration to promote the Committee in its work in a sensible and proportionate way.

RESOLVED that

1. The report be noted
2. A Publicity and Communications programme be developed for the Committee's consideration.

S Local Assessment - Case Studies

136/09

Members were presented with a case study and asked to consider and discuss a summary of a Planning Committee scenario.

The Committee were asked to provide its views on whether or not a personal interest should have been disclosed under the Code of Conduct.

S Standards Committee Forward Plan 2009/2011

137/09

Members were asked to consider the Standards Committee Forward Plan for 2009/2011.

The Committee was also given a copy of the Council's Statutory Forward Plan for consideration.

RESOLVED that the reports be received.