

Standards Committee

A meeting of Standards Committee was held on Friday, 23rd April, 2010.

Present: Mr F W Hayes(Chairman), Mr M Armstrong(Vice-Chair), Cllr Paul Baker, Mrs E Chapman(Independent Member), Cllr Cockerill(Vice Cllr Sherris), Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Bill Noble, Mr T Bowman(Parish Representative), Cllr John Fletcher(Substitute Elected Member) Roger Mosley(Substitute Parish Representative)

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

Also in attendance: None

Apologies: Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Chris Nestor(Substitute Independent Representative), Mr C.V.Algie(Parish Representative)

S **Declarations of Interest**

1/10

Cllr Ian Dalgarno declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in the item entitled - Attendance at Town/Parish Council Meeting as a Member of Thornaby Town Council.

Roger Mosley declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in the item entitled - Attendance at Town/Parish Council Meeting as a Member of Thornaby Town Council.

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

2/10

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.

Thornaby Town Council - 23rd March 2010 - attended by Chris Nestor and Cllr John Fletcher.

Yarm Town Council - 13th April 2010 - attended by Francis Hayes and Edna Chapman

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

RESOLVED that

1. The information be received
2. Feedback, as discussed, be provided to the relevant Clerks.
3. Members inform the Councils Monitoring Officer of outstanding meeting dates which they could attend.

S **Observing Council Meetings**

3/10

The Committee was informed that the following meetings had been attended:-

Planning Committee - 21st April 2010 - attended by Roger Mosley

Members received a verbal assessment of the meeting above from Roger Mosley about the proceedings and agreed appropriate feedback.

RESOLVED that

1. The information be received
2. Feedback, as discussed, be provided to the relevant Chair and Officers.

S **Observing Local Strategic Partnership Meetings**

4/10

Members were made aware that there was still one meeting of the LSP to be observed, the Committee was asked to contact the Monitoring Officer with availability to attend any of the meeting dates.

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

S **Members' and Officers' Interests**

5/10

The Committee received a report that provided details of Members' and Officers' interests.

Reminders about updating interests on the Member's register continued to be circulated. The most recent reminder was sent on 13 April 2010. As previously agreed, this included a message from the Committee. This was reported elsewhere on the agenda. The reminders also covered co-optees and their interests. Revised details were 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 provided for recent meetings was provided. Details of interests declared by Members were also provided. The declarations made in relation to the Planning Committee reflected advice previously discussed with the Committee regarding bias or predetermination.

Advice regarding Outside Bodies had been and would continue to be provided to Members when appropriate or necessary for the purposes of their roles on outside organisations e.g. as Directors of Companies.

A (Monitoring Officer) register inspection of the Officers' declarations had taken place on 18 March 2010. Details of actions arising were provided. Officers were last asked to review and update their register details on 30 March 2010.

Updates to Town/Parish Council registers were received fairly regularly and advice about declarations of interest continued to be provided to Town/Parish Council Clerks when requested or considered necessary. An anonymised example was attached. A reminder to Town/Parish Clerks about ensuring that their councillors continued to update their register details was sent on 13 April 2010.

Work had continued to be undertaken with relevant Officers to ensure that registration and declaration of interests becomes more embedded in the governance arrangements of partnerships, Renaissance and TVU. A further

example of the guidance was provided and also details of declarations made as a result of it.

Feedback regarding how well the new arrangements were bedding in and how effective the guidance was perceived to be was as follows:-

- Discussions with the Chief Executive had indicated that there had been a noticeable improvement (in awareness) and that probity was visibly being taken more seriously.
- The officers who administered and advised at the meetings had reported that there had been an increase in awareness and in the number of declarations of interest being made. Members seemed to have accepted the ethos involved now. The officers had mentioned that it might be useful for some training to take place with members regarding the difference between a non-prejudicial and a prejudicial interest.

RESOLVED that the information be noted and the Monitoring Officer be asked to explore the request for training further.

**S
6/10**

Members' and Officers' Gifts and Hospitality

Members considered a report that provided details of procedures and returns received during the final quarter of the year January 2010 - March 2010.

The Members' Register had again been reviewed. There were no recorded examples of gifts/hospitality received by Members in the final quarter of the year. Members were last asked to update their register details on 13 April 2010.

Advice on Outside Bodies had been and would continue to be provided to Members regarding their roles on other organisations. This took the form of information provided generally to all Members or one to one advice or advice to two or more Members.

A further review had been undertaken of the Officers' gifts and hospitality register. Details of the findings and examples for the final quarter of the year were provided. Officers were last reminded about updating their register details on 30 March 2010.

Town/Parish Councils were last asked to ensure that their Councillors provided details of any gifts or hospitality offered/received on 13 April 2010. No returns had been highlighted.

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.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

**S
7/10**

A Review of the Local Standards Framework

The report provided the Committee with details of Standards for England's recent review of the local standards framework "Local Standards 2.0 - the proportionality upgrade".

Members were provided with a statement about the review from the Chair of Standards for England. The conclusions drawn were that the framework was working at a local level, and that whilst there were problems, generally the new system had secured a considerable level of consent across local government. Extracts from the review report were also provided. These comprised an introduction to the review and the Executive Summary. The Committee was asked to consider the review details. The full review report was accessible on Standards for England's website.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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8/10 **Local Government Ombudsman Complaints 2009/10 - Final Quarter**

Members considered a report that provided details of complaints received from and determined by the Ombudsman during the final quarter of 2009/10.

In the period 1 January to 31 March 2010, 5 complaints were received from the Local Government Ombudsman. In the same period, 4 complaints were determined and closed by the Ombudsman. There were no maladministration reports or determinations and no other issues of concern.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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9/10 **Monitoring Officer Work Programme - 2009/10 - Final Report**

This report provided the Committee with a final report regarding progress in delivering the Monitoring Officer work programme for 2009/10.

As previously indicated the Monitoring Officer's Annual Report for 2008/09, as approved by Council on 9 September 2009 included a work programme for 2009/10. Attached at the Appendix to this report was an updated schedule containing details of the progress during 2009/10 in delivering the work programme. The schedule set out the six improvement areas, key actions for each, the target dates for completion, progress and any comments. The Committee was asked to consider/assess progress against the work programme, as set out in the schedule. This represented progress for the full municipal year.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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10/10 **Messages from the Standards Committee**

Members considered provided details of messages from the Committee which have been publicised since the most recent meeting. At the Standards Committee meeting on 12 February 2010 it was agreed that a programme of messages from the Committee should be implemented in accordance with the arrangements outlined in the report. The Committee was provided with a copy of a message which had been publicised in connection with the reminders recently sent to Stockton members and Town/Parish Council Members regarding their register of interests details. Further messages would be publicised over the coming months and details would be reported to the next

available Committee meeting.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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11/10 **Local Assessment - Case Studies**

Members considered a case study and discussed a summary of an investigation report and provided their views on what decisions they would make.

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12/10 **Information/Discussion Items**

Members of the Committee considered the following items :-

1. Setting the Standard - Standards for England
2. Annual Report of the Audit Committee
3. Review of Internal Audit

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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13/10 **Standards Committee Forward Plan 2009/2011**

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. Members also received the Councils Statutory Forward Plan. It was indicated that the meeting scheduled for the 20th May had been rearranged for the 21st May.

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