

MINUTES OF: THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 9th October 2007

**PRESENT: Mr A Neville (Chair)
Councillors Dickinson (substitute for Cheetham), L. Barnes
(substitute for Smith), Forshaw, Hancock and Sandiford (substitute
for Thorne)
Councillor Grogan (Whitworth Town Councillor)
Mr B Divine and Mr A Nixon (Independent Members)**

**IN ATTENDANCE: Linda Fisher, Executive Director of Regulatory Services
Heather Moore, Committee and Member Services Manager**

The Chair placed on record the Committee's gratitude to the late Councillor Peter Gill for his diligence and hard work during his time on the Standards Committee.

The Chair welcomed the new independent members Mr Divine and Mr Nixon.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cheetham, J. Pawson, Smith and Thorne.

2. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

The Chair reported that there were no urgent items.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14th JUNE 2007

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14th June 2007 be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

5. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided an update on the actions since the last meeting of the Committee as summarised below.

The Chair reported that the Work Programme was progressing well and he thanked the officers for their support.

He further reported that no complaints had been made under the Whistleblowing Policy.

In respect of declarations of interest, the Chair informed the meeting that the Legal Section were actively progressing any forms which were outstanding.

The Chair reported that he was attending the Standards Board Conference on 15th and 16th October. He highlighted that the Independent Members Conference was taking place later in the year.

The Chair reported the receipt of a letter from Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council in respect of Standards and collaborative working. The letter was inviting Pennine Lancashire authorities to formulate ideas for joint working. The Committee welcomed the approach which would build capacity on dealing with Standards matters. The Executive Director of Regulatory Services reported on the reciprocal arrangement with Burnley Borough Council whereby legal advice was provided for Hearings.

The Chair referred to the recent Standards Panel Hearing and the Committee requested that their concerns be noted that the meeting had to be rescheduled due to not being quorate. The Executive Director of Regulatory Services informed the meeting that a note had been circulated to all Elected Members on the importance of the Panel Hearings.

The meeting discussed the sanctions that could be imposed by the Hearing and it was agreed that the procedure be circulated to all members of the Committee for information.

Training for Members was discussed and the Committee and Member Services Manager agreed to see if the scope of the equalities training could be extended to include scenarios relating to standards matters. It was also agreed that the training be extended to Pennine Lancashire authorities and the Committee and Member Services Manager agreed to contact them with details of the event. Training for Whitworth Town Councillors was discussed and Councillor Grogan provided some dates on which training could take place.

6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions were raised under this item.

7. MINUTES OF THE AUDIT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 6th SEPTEMBER 2007

The Chair reported that the Minutes of the Audit Scrutiny Committee were circulated to the Standards Committee for information as both meetings had cross cutting issues to consider. The Chair reported that he had attended the last Audit Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved:

That the Minutes be noted.

8. REVIEW OF COMPLAINT LEARNING

The Committee considered the joint report of the Executive Director of Regulatory Services and the Head of Customer Services and E-Government which provided information on the improvements contained within the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Letter for the year ended 31st March 2007 together with an update on activities within the Complaints and

Feedback process.

Councillor Sandiford reported that the Performance Scrutiny Committee had considered the report and she outlined future reporting arrangements of the Ombudsman's Annual Letter whereby the report would initially be considered by Performance Scrutiny and the Committee would also receive six monthly updates on progress to ensure improvements continued to be made.

The Executive Director of Regulatory Services highlighted the importance of learning from complaints and she reported that within the Planning Service a number of improvements had been made in response to feedback received.

The Executive Director of Regulatory Services further reported that a Compliments system was in place and a number of positive comments had been received about the Council.

Resolved:

1. That Members note the content of the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Letter for the period ending 31st March 2007 and place on record their thanks to the Local Government Ombudsman's Office for their support and guidance over the past year.
2. That Members note the improvements carried out in respect of the Customer Complaints and Feedback Procedure.
3. That the report considered by the Performance Scrutiny Committee should include information on the Compliments System so that members are aware of positive comments received by the Council.
4. That officers be congratulated on the improvements made.

9. WHITWORTH TOWN COUNCIL – USE OF FACILITIES BY MEMBERS POLICY

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Resources which outlined that Whitworth Town Council had introduced a formal policy in respect of the Use by Members of Town Council facilities.

The Committee and Member Services Manager reminded Members that the Standards Committee had recommended the adoption of the Policy and she had met with the Town Clerk to take the recommendation forward.

A Member raised concern about the availability of photocopying facilities for Members. The Committee and Member Services Manager reported that Democratic Services offered a service at Futures Park and it was noted that the One Stop Shop was available. A suggestion was made that a service be provided at Hardman Mill.

Resolved:

That the introduction of the Policy be noted.

10. DELIVERING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Executive Director of Regulatory Services informed the Committee of the revised Governance Statement for Local Authorities.

The Executive Director of Regulatory Services reported that the revised Statement replaced the former CIPFA/SOLACE Framework on which the Council's local code of corporate governance was based. She outlined the proposed course of action set out in the report for the consideration of the Committee.

Resolved:

That the proposed course of action, as set out in paragraph 4.5 of the report be approved.

11. OFFICE OF SURVEILLANCE COMMISSIONERS ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered the Office of Surveillance Commissioners Annual Report. The Executive Director of Regulatory Services reported that the Council had an annual inspection in respect of the procedures relating to Regulatory Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA). The last inspection had been positive and recommendations had been made.

The Committee agreed that a further report should be presented outlining how the recommendations had been implemented together with information on authorisations and the type of surveillance being undertaken. It was suggested that a joint meeting of the Standards Committee and Audit Scrutiny be held to consider the report.

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Executive Director of Regulatory Services be asked to submit a report to the next meeting and that the Audit Scrutiny Committee be invited to attend so that the report can be considered together.

12. STANDARDS BULLETIN

The Committee considered the Standards Bulletin which had been prepared by the Interim Legal and Democratic Services Manager. It was agreed that the bulletin should be circulated to all officers.

Resolved:

That the Bulletin be agreed.

13. GOVERNANCE CHAMPIONS

The Committee and Member Services Manager reported on proposals to establish Governance Champions within the Council. She reported that the champions would be invited to participate in meetings to ensure that they were consulted on governance issues affecting the Council so that this could be cascaded throughout their teams.

The Standards Committee discussed the proposal and suggested that the appropriate level of officer to attend the meetings could be middle managers as they could facilitate information being cascaded at all levels of the organisation.

The Committee further considered opportunities for closer working with officers and the Executive Director of Regulatory Services suggested that the remit of the Committee be extended so that policies considered by the Joint Consultative Committee could be forwarded to the Standards Committee for information.

Resolved:

1. That the Council's Senior Management Team be asked to identify Governance Champions within their service areas.
2. That the draft role description be approved.
3. That the remit of the Governance Champions be agreed as set out in 4.2 of the report.

(The meeting started at 6.35pm and finished at 7.55pm)