

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Monday, 15 June 2009

PRESENT: Councillor Harley (Chair); Mrs Moss (Deputy Chair); M. Edwards, D. Hughes, T. Morris and Councillor Hawkins

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Capstick and Flavell.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26 March 2009 were signed by the Chair.

3. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES

None.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

5. MATTERS OF URGENCY WHICH BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THE CHAIR IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED

None.

6. APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY CHAIR

The Borough Solicitor reported that Annual Council on 21 May 2009 had confirmed appointments to the Committee but had not appointed the Deputy-Chair. He invited the Committee to consider the appointment of a Deputy-Chair.

RESOLVED: That Mrs G Moss become the Committee's Deputy-Chair for 2009/10 and that Mr T Morris be the Deputy-Chair for 2010/11.

7. REGISTER OF DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY- MONITORING REPORT

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report and commented that the Register was, in effect, a rolling document whereby Councillors were required to notify him of changes to their Declaration within 28 days of any change occurring. There was no legal requirement for an annual return however this was considered best practice. He reported that as of the meeting there were three declarations outstanding there being mitigating circumstances in one case. It was noted that reminders to Councillors were channelled through the Group Whips and Political Assistants and if necessary the Group Leaders were involved.

RESOLVED: (1) That for the current year the Borough Solicitor continue to pursue the two outstanding declarations and that if necessary the Deputy-Chair, upon advice from the Borough Solicitor, speak to the appropriate Group Leader(s) and the Councillors concerned in order to have their Declarations returned promptly.

(2) That in respect of future years, the Committee set out in its Newsletter its intention that for 2010/11 and subsequent years that all Declarations of Interest should be completed and returned by the

- date of the Annual Council Meeting.
- (3) That the Monitoring Officer send a briefing to all Councillors outlining their obligations to the Register of Interests and to declare Gifts and Hospitality.

8. STANDARDS COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report and referred to the draft newsletter appended to it.

A discussion then ensued in respect of the Whistleblowing Policy it being noted that the proposed article be enhanced by acknowledging the support of the senior and political management of the Council for the policy and giving an assurance as to their support to employees who might come forward with concerns.

- RESOLVED:** (1) That the Borough Solicitor prepare a draft newsletter as discussed and circulate it to members of the Committee for comments prior to publication.
- (2) That the proposed draft Terms of Reference for the Committee be circulated to members of the Committee.

9. ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report which set out the achievements of the Committee over the previous year and commented that for future years it was intended that a much more detailed report would be prepared and submitted to Council. This would include a statistical analysis of cases that the Committee had dealt with.

A discussion ensued in respect of cases considered by the Sub-Committees of the Committee it being noted that monitoring reports would be presented to the Committee based on the information sent to the Standards Board for England as part of the periodic statistical returns. It was also noted that a more detailed assessment of costs of dealing with these matters should be instituted including Councillors and Independent Members time so that people would be more generally aware of the costs involved.

A discussion ensued in respect of the proposed Away Day it being agreed that dates in early September should be considered.

- RESOLVED:** That the Annual Report be noted and that the Borough Solicitor consider a way of accurately assessing the cost of dealing with complaints submitted to the Committee, and that if possible, the proposed Away Day be arranged for 1, 2 or 3 September 2009.

10. RIPA INSPECTION

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report that detailed the inspection carried out by the Office of the Surveillance Commissioner into the use of and compliance with the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. He noted that the Inspector was generally satisfied with what he had found and would make some suggestions to update the forms that were currently being used. He understood that the Inspector's Report had recently been received and he would circulate this to members of the Committee.

In answer to a question the Borough Solicitor noted that different public bodies could apply the powers given in the Act at different levels. The Inspector's Report would be submitted to Cabinet.

- RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

11. RIPA CONSULTATION

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report that detailed a consultation document from the Department of Communities and Local Government of proposed changes to the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and the associated codes of practice.

RESOLVED: That the Borough Solicitor send copies of the full consultation document to all members of the Committee for comments to be returned to him to be included in the response.

12. STANDARDS BOARD BULLETINS

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report that appended issue 43 of the Standards Board for England's Bulletin.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

13. MEMBER TRAINING

The Borough Solicitor commented that the Committee had previously discussed the number of its members who could attend the Annual Standards Conference. He had raised this with the Council's Training and Development Manager who in turn had raised the matter with the Councillor Chair of the Councillor Reference Group which oversaw Councillor training. The Chair had agreed to the funding of one attendee at the conference but it was not clear whether this was confirmation of the existing arrangement or represented a single additional place.

It was noted that apart from a budget for carrying out investigations of complaints, the Committee had no formal budget. The Committee commented that if the funding did represent one further place at the conference this was to be welcomed but it would hope for further funding if the Council was serious about the ethical agenda.

RESOLVED: That the Borough Solicitor investigate further opportunities to provide funding for additional members of the Committee to be able to go to the Standards Conference in October and that he begin, at the appropriate time, the process to ensure that the Committee has an appropriate level of budget to underpin its work.

The meeting concluded at 19.47 hours

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