

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Monday, 13 June 2011

PRESENT: I Harley (Chair); T Morris (Deputy Chair); D Hughes, M Edwards, Z Turner, Councillors Capstick, Eldred, Flavell and Glynane

1 APOLOGIES

None

2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 7th March 2011 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 THE ANNUAL REPORT TO STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Chair welcomed all members to the committee and offered his congratulations to those Councillors who had been re-elected and welcomed them as representatives to the Standards Committee.

A report was submitted on behalf of the Borough Solicitor, of the Annual Report of the Standards Committee. Within the report, information was given in relation to the Standards Committee, which included Membership, the frequency of meetings, Local Handling of Complaints, the Promotion of Ethical Framework and Training. It was reported that during 2010/11 there had been three new complaints received and processed accordingly. It was noted that the Sub-Committee had not been asked to review any of the decision that had been made during 2010/11.

It was noted that induction training for Councillors had been carried out in May 2011 post elections and another training session would be held on the 23rd June to discuss the Code of Conduct and any other issues such as any other training needs.

The Chair referred to appendix 2 of the report and explained to the Committee that the collective thought of the previous Committee members had been to demonstrate to Government most strongly their opinions and concerns about the proposed abolition of the Standards Board Regime under the Localism Bill. The Chair explained that members of the Standards Committee had been not only concerned with ensuring Councillors complied with the Code of Conduct but that it had also protected Councillors from vexatious complaints made by members of the public.

The Chair informed members that he was aware that the abolition of the Standards Regime would happen under the Localism Bill and it would be necessary to devise a way forward to progress and implement any necessary changes. Reference was made to the Councils

vastly improved performance over the last few years and the Chair commented that some of this was due to the high standards and conduct of elected Councillors.

Councillor Glynane commented that Standards had worked positively for Councillors as it offered them protection from vexatious complaints and without it there could be an erosion of people's faith and trust in their local Councillors. He further commented that the abolition of the Standards Board Regime, would result in the police being held responsible for conducting investigations into matters relating to any criminality of a Councillor but not morality, which was covered by the Code of Conduct.

Councillor Flavell expressed concern that once the Standards Board Regime had been abolished the consequences of poor conduct would be more unchecked and that there was a necessity to have checks and balances in place in order to promote good conduct. It was questioned what the consequences would be should there be no ramifications for improper conduct without a framework in place. Cllr Capstick commented that the party Leaders would have the ability to withdraw the whip but it was commented that this was not considered a likely or productive consequence.

Z Turner commented that it would be sensible to take a proactive approach to the implementation of the Localism Bill and focus on providing measures sooner rather than later to deal with the consequences of the abolition.

Councillor Capstick suggested that the way to proceed would be to hold a meeting with all Party Leaders, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Executive to get a unified voice and to publicize the fact that Northampton Borough Council would be maintaining and promoting high standards of conduct post abolition of the regime.

In response to a question asked, the Solicitor informed the Committee that Local Authorities would still be able to have a Standards Committee and a voluntary Code of Conduct but that the remit of a Standards Committee and the detail of any code would be the subject of consultation particularly with a view to the powers to make sanctions, which would inevitably be limited as a result of the Localism Bill.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Chair of Standards, The Monitoring Officer, The Chief Executive and Leader of the Council meet to express the concerns of the Standards Committee and which aspects of the Communications Strategy and Action Plan would be introduced.
2. That the above people be invited to the next meeting of the Standards Committee to be held on the 17th October 2011.

7 STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND CASE REVIEW 2010

A report was submitted on behalf of the Monitoring Officer, which sought the attention of members to the Standards for England's Case Review for 2010, attached to the report.

The Chair commented that the report was for noting and that the majority of the Case Reviews were very much based on common sense.

The Solicitor explained that the Case Reviews were a good reference point for members of the Standards Committee and commented that it may be of particular use when discussing any proposed new Code of Conduct.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted.

8 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Chair moved that the Public and Press be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that there was likely to be disclosure to them of such categories of exempt information as defined by Section 100(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 as listed against such items of business by reference to the appropriate paragraph of Schedule 12A to such Act.

The Motion was Carried.

The meeting concluded at 18.52