

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Monday, 13 December 2010

PRESENT: I Harley (Chair); T Morris (Deputy Chair); Mrs Moss, D Hughes, Z Turner and Councillors J Hollis and Scott

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Flavell and Matthews.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 18th October 2010 were signed as a true record subject to the following amendments; that under 'Apologies, The Chair welcomed Wendy Lovell – *Northampton County Council*' be changed to '*Northamptonshire County Council*' and that Item 7, penultimate paragraph, last line reads, submission of quarterly **or** annual returns, rather than submission of quarterly **of** annual returns.

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. LETTER TO THE GOVERNMENT

A report submitted on behalf on behalf of the Borough Solicitor, which informed members of the Standards Committee on a letter drafted by the Chair of the Committee about the Coalition Government's proposal to abolish the Standards Board Regime. The Chair requested feedback and welcomed comments on the contents of the draft letter.

The Borough Solicitor outlined the Governments intention to abolish the Standards Regime including the Model Code of Conduct with the intention that Local Authorities would be able to maintain a Standards Committee. He reported that this would have vastly reduced powers, which would not be statutory, but primary legislation was still needed and the committee were minded to consider this when making any recommendation.

Mr Hughes stated that the abolition of the Standards Regime was a retrograde step, and therefore he would be happy for the letter to be delivered to the relevant people and voiced his approval of the contents.

Councillors Hollis and Scott argued that the abolition of the Standards Regime would send out the wrong message to Members, future Members and the general public and that whilst aspects of Localism were positive it was considered that this would be a step too far.

The proposed letter penned by the Chair was unanimously supported and it was agreed that it should be sent to a variety of parties in both central and local government for comment.

It was noted that all party leaders at Northampton Borough Council had demonstrated their support in maintaining the Standards Regime and the Chair thanked committee members for their support.

Resolved: -

That the letter be circulated to the Association of Local Councillors, Association of Parish Councillors, MP's Andrea Leason, Brian Binley, Michael Ellis, Erik Pickles and the Leaders of Northampton Borough Council.

7. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBER

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report, which informed the Standards Committee about the progress of the recruitment of a new Independent member, who would replace a retiring Independent Member. It was reported that there had been a high number of applicant's nearly all of whom had been of a high calibre. The Monitoring Officer explained that a percent of members of the Standards Committee had to be Independent in order to make it quorate.

The new independent left the room while the discussion took place.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the recruitment process to the Standards Committee had previously been top down, but as it had matured, the Committee had become more level and the recruitment of new members would be more influenced by the Chair and other members of the Committee rather than external influences.

The Chair reported that Zillah Turner had been recruited as she had demonstrated the greatest enthusiasm to undertake meaningful public voluntary service. It was noted that she would not have any problems attending the meetings and that she was very levelheaded, intelligent and independent in thinking.

Resolved: -

That they recommend to Full Council in January 2011 the appointment of Zillah Turner to the Standards Committee to fill the vacancy left by a retiring member.

8. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

The Borough Solicitor outlined the report, which sought to ascertain from Members of the Standards Committee their training needs on Standards issues. It was reported that whilst the Standards Board Regime would be abolished, members should not make assumption about what would happen and that as of yet, it had not been superseded. The Borough Solicitor explained that the Standards Committee would still be valid and would continue to carry out necessary training.

Councillor Hollis explained that the Member Development Group was already in discussions with regards to training new Councillors – which would follow the Local Government elections, expected to take place in May 2011. The members agreed that Chairs should receive training on what they were intended to do and that all newly elected Members should be made fully aware of the Code of Conduct. Councillor Scott suggested

that it would be important for newly elected Members to remain grounded but that longer serving Councillors should not become complacent with their positions.

Councillor Hollis further suggested that part of their duty was to protect public sector employees from being bullied and that it may be a good idea to invite employees to attend Standards training to ensure that they know how to complain if they feel a Member is bullying them. The Chair reported that it would be of interest to see if the trade unions supported the Standards Committee in addressing accusations of bullying.

The Borough Solicitor stated that the committee still had a statutory responsibility, which should be used when necessary and that when the Standards Board Regime was abolished transitional provisions would be put in place.

Resolved: -

- 1. That newly elected Members be given extensive training on the Code of Conduct**
- 2. That Chairs be fully trained on what they are intended to do**
- 3. That members would publicize the fact that the Standards Board Regime had not yet been abolished and statutory responsibilities were still maintained.**

9. 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 6.41pm