

Cherwell District Council

Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 22 January 2009 at 6.30 pm

Present: Douglas Frewer (Chairman)

Sadie Reynolds
Councillor Mrs Catherine Fulljames
Councillor Eric Heath
Councillor Russell Hurle
Councillor Devena Rae
Councillor Bernard Lane
Jim McBeth
Councillor Alan Greenslade-Hibbert

Substitute
Members: Councillor David Carr

Apologies for
absence: Councillor Fred Blackwell
Councillor James Macnamara
Councillor George Parish
Councillor Rose Stratford

Officers: Alexa Coates, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer
Liz Howlett, Head of Legal & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Natasha Clark, Trainee Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

29 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

30 Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting

There were none.

31 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.

32 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following changes to Minute Number 6: that Mr Greenslade Hibbert had attended the first day of the seventh annual assembly of Standards Committees and Mr McBeth the second day.

33 Press Protocol for Standards Committee

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer proposing a press protocol for Standards Committee.

The Committee considered the draft protocol and when to inform the press of a complaint. In addition the Committee considered when it would be appropriate to inform individual Councillors that a complaint had been made about them. The Committee supported the current approach of notifying a member when a complaint had been received about them and felt that only in exceptional circumstances should the Monitoring Officer not notify the member.

The Committee considered the wording of the draft protocol and suggested the following amendments

Resolved

That the draft press protocol be submitted for consultation to local media organisations subject to the following changes:

- (1) As a matter of course, notice that any press inquiry has been made should be given to the Chairman of the Standards Committee and the monitoring officer.
- (2) The Decision Notice should be available for public inspection within seven working days after the Assessment Sub-Committee has reached its decision. There is no requirement for the decision to be published on the internet. Where the decision is to take no action and a review is requested of this decision we will not publish until the review is completed.
- (3) There is no intention to automatically notify the press. Information may be given on an 'if asked' basis.

34 Standards Board Quarterly Statistics

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer informing members of the Standards Board Quarterly Statistics. The Committee noted that of 127 complaints referred to the Standards Board in the last quarter in only 2 cases were the decisions of the local assessment panel overturned.

The Committee also commented on the level of complaints received from members of the public, which was 55%, noting that a high number of complaints came from other sources such as other Councillors.

Resolved

That the contents of the report be noted.

(Councillor Rae left the meeting at the conclusion of this item.)

35 Call-In Review

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which sought the Committee's comments on proposed changes to the Call-in model and the subsequent proposed changes to the Council's Constitution.

Members noted the difficulties in obtaining six signatories required to call-in a decision and supported the new arrangements which allowed notification by email and text.

Resolved

- (1) That the results of the consultation on the review of Call-in and the proposals from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive be noted.
- (2) That the revised Call-in model be approved subject to the following amendment to 17.Call-in Protocol at Overview and Scrutiny, The meeting Paragraph 9: The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will debate the issue, only members of the Committee and the officer appointed by the Chief Executive to advise the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Call-in may speak.

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Standards Board Training

Members who attended the Standards Board Training in Oxford on 8 January 2009 reported to the Committee. Members found the training useful particularly the scenarios used and the interaction with committee members and monitoring officers from other authorities. Members commented that the organisation and seating arrangements had not been as good as at other Standards Board Training sessions.

As part of a wider training programme the independent members and parish representatives were invited to attend a Council planning meeting on 29 January 2009.

The meeting ended at 7.11 pm

Chairman:

Date: