

Standards Committee

Thursday 30 October, 2008 at 6.00 p.m.

at the Council House, Walsall

Present

Mr. R. Meller (Chairman)
Mr. L. Bates (Vice-Chairman)
Mrs. H. Bashir
Dr. K. Biscomb
Ms. K. McLeod
Councillor M. Pitt
Mr. A. Wood
Councillor V. Woodruff

274/08 Apology

An apology for non-attendance was submitted on behalf of Councillor Cassidy.

275/08 Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2008, copies having been sent to each member of the Committee, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

276/08 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

277/08 Appointment of independent members to Standards Committee

The report of the Assistant Director of Legal and Constitutional Services and Monitoring Officer was submitted:

(see annexed)

The Assistant Director of Legal and Constitutional Services, Mr. Gill presented the report and answered questions raised by the Committee arising from the report, following which it was:

Resolved

That the contents of the report be noted.

278/08 Local Government Ombudsman – Report into complaint 07/B/07346

A report was submitted:

(see annexed)

Mr. J. Pryce-Jones, Corporate Performance Manager (Customer Focus and Intelligence) was in attendance for this item and outlined the report.

In answer to questions raised by members Mr. Pryce-Jones confirmed that lessons had been learnt from the Ombudsman's review and procedures were now in place to prevent the same situation arising in the future.

Resolved

That the contents of the report be noted.

279/08 Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review 2007/2008

A report was submitted:

(see annexed)

Mr. J. Pryce-Jones, Corporate Performance Manager (Customer Focus and Intelligence) was in attendance for this item and outlined the report.

In answer to questions raised by members Mr. Pryce-Jones confirmed that most complaints to the Ombudsman showed no maladministration by the Council, although the number of cases had increased since 2006/7. Mr. Pryce-Jones advised members that the average response time had deteriorated since 2006/07. This was, in part, due to the complexity of complaints received, however, this was an area he was working to improve,

Resolved

That the contents of the report be noted.

280/08 **Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Annual Review – April 2007 to March 2008**

A report was submitted:

(see annexed)

Mrs. A. Galbraith, Principal Performance Officer (Information and Records) was in attendance for this item and outlined the report.

In answer to questions raised by members, Mrs. Galbraith confirmed the report showed an increase in complex requests over the 12 month period which was being replicated by neighbouring Councils, adding that 77% of all requests had been resolved within 20 working days.

Members questioned the number of requests which were received from journalists/political parties. Mr. Pryce-Jones confirmed that a significant proportion of requests were received from these areas and following a discussion by members it was agreed that a letter be sent to central government asking for a change in the law so that fixed charges were put against information requests which were to be used for commercial gain.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) That annual reports on Freedom of Information matters continue to be received on an on-going basis.
- (3) That a letter be sent to central government asking for a change in the law so that fixed charges were put against information requests which were to be used for commercial gain.

281/08 **Case Law update**

The report of the Assistant Director of Legal and Constitutional Services and Monitoring Officer was submitted:

(see annexed)

The Assistant Director of Legal and Constitutional Services, Mr. Gill presented the report and answered questions raised by the Committee arising from the report, following which it was:

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) That the Monitoring Officer circulate the report to all elected members.

282/08 **Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees – 13 and 14 October 2008**

The report of the Assistant Director of Legal and Constitutional Services and Monitoring Officer was submitted:

(see annexed)

The Assistant Director of Legal and Constitutional Services, Mr. Gill presented the report.

Mr. R. Meller (Chair), Mr. L. Bates (Vice-Chair) and Ms. K. McLeod (independent member) confirmed the usefulness of the Assembly for newly appointed members to the Committee and the opportunity it gave for networking with other delegates present.

Resolved

That the contents of the report be noted.

283/08 **Standards Board for England – The Bulletin – August 2008**

The report of the Assistant Director of Legal and Constitutional Services and Monitoring Officer was submitted:

(see annexed)

The Assistant Director of Legal and Constitutional Services, Mr. Gill presented the report and answered questions raised by the Committee arising from the report, following which it was:

Resolved

- (1) That the content of the report and the Bulletin be noted.
- (2) That copies of The Bulletin be circulated to all members and co-optees and placed in each of the political group rooms.

The meeting terminated at 7.35 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: