

Standards Committee

Monday 6 April, 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

at the Council House, Walsall

Present

Mr. R. Meller (Chairman)
Mr. L. Bates (Vice-Chairman)
Dr. K. Biscomb
Councillor B. Cassidy
Ms. K. McLeod
Mr. A. Wood
Councillor V. Woodruff

In attendance

Mr. R. Borealis, Executive Director, Resources

294/09 Apologies

An apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor A. Andrew and Mrs. H. Bashir.

295/09 Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 January, 2009 copies having been sent to each member of the Committee, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

296/09 Matters arising

It was agreed at the last meeting of the Committee on 5 January, 2009 that the Assistant Director of Legal and Constitutional Services “draw lots” to determine the period of service for Ms. K. McLeod, Dr. K. Biscomb and Mr. A. Wood (Minute no. 290/08(3)).

Resolved

- (1) That Dr. K. Biscomb serve on the Committee until the end of the municipal year 2010/2011.

- (2) That Ms. K. McLeod and Mr. A. Wood serve on the Committee until the end of the municipal year 2011/2012.

It was agreed at the last meeting of the Committee on 5 January, 2009 that the Assistant Director of Legal and Constitutional Services prepare a report on the authority's subsistence and expenses scheme for members (Minute no. 290/08(5)).

Resolved

That the report on subsistence and expenses be deferred to the until the next meeting of the Committee.

297/09 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

298/09 **Response from the Ministry of Justice – Freedom of Information Act, 2000**

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

(see annexed)

The Constitutional Services Manager presented the report and answered questions raised by the Committee.

Resolved

- (1) That the content of the report be noted.
- (2) That a report on existing fees regulations be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

299/09 **Council publicity – run up to elections**

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

(see annexed)

The Constitutional Services Manager presented the report and answered questions raised by the Committee.

The Committee discussed Council publicity in the run up to elections and although this did not prevent members from attending Committee or for portfolio holders from making statements on behalf of the Council/Cabinet as a whole, it was felt that in the past some members had used certain situations as “photo opportunities”. Mr. Garner made the point that the Council’s policy was monitored by the Press and Communications Unit and that no press releases were issued without approval from the Chief Executive or Executive Directors. The Committee recommended that in future, the report on Council publicity be extended to include the area of “photo opportunities”.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) That the Monitoring Officer forward a copy of the report on Council publicity to all group leaders (independent members) to bring the report to the attention of their members,
- (3) That the Assistant Director write to all Executive Directors informing them of the provisions of the code.
- (4) That the report on Council publicity be extended to include a section on “photo opportunities”.

300/09 Recruitment of independent members to Standards Committee 2009/10

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

(see annexed)

The Constitutional Services Manager presented the report and answered questions raised by the Committee.

Mr. Garner advised the Committee that following the publication of Walsall Pride’s credit crunch special, the next edition of the Council paper would not be circulated to residents until July 2009. He continued that following consultation with the Deputy Monitoring Officer, the recruitment process was being initiated with advertisements placed in the Express & Star within the next couple of weeks. He confirmed that the whole process was planned for completion in time for Annual Council at the end of May.

Resolved

That the content of the report be noted.

301/09 **Case law update**

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

(see annexed)

The Constitutional Services Manager presented the report and answered questions raised by the Committee.

Resolved

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

302/09 **Standards Board for England – The Bulletin – December 2008**

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

(see annexed)

The Constitutional Services Manager presented the report and answered questions raised by the Committee arising from the report.

Members of the Committee raised concern at the article entitled “Getting indemnity arrangements right” and requested that this issue be fully investigated to ensure that independent members are fully covered by indemnity arrangements.

Resolved

- (1) That the content of the report be noted.
- (2) That copies of “The Bulletin” be circulated to all members and co-opted members and placed in each of the political group rooms.
- (3) That a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee regarding indemnity arrangements for independent members.

The meeting terminated at 6.25 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: