

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD ON FROM 14 SEPTEMBER 2010 7.30 PM TO 8.35 PM**

Present:-

Wokingham Borough Members:- *Pauline Helliar-Symons and Malcolm Storry*

Independent Members:- *David Comben (Chairman), Anita H Grosz (Vice Chairman),
Eric Davies and Geoff Wilde*

Parish/Town Council representative:- *Mr J Heggadon.*

*Also present:- Kevin Jacob, Principal Democratic Services Officer
Colin Lawley, Legal Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer*

PART I

14. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 June 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the correction of three minor typographical corrections.

15. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Chris Bowring, Ray Duncan, John Giles and Roy Mantel.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

17. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

18. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

19. PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL QUESTION TIME

There were no Parish/Town Councillor questions.

20. PROTOCOL FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The Committee considered a report and attached appendices, (Agenda pages 5 to 13) which set out extracts of the Council's adopted Partnership Protocol and a template Partnership Protocol as developed by Standards for England.

In presenting the item, Kevin Jacob commented that it was felt that the aspects of the Council's Partnership Protocol included within the Agenda papers adequately covered aspects of personal behaviour and conduct. However, it was felt that the protocol template produced by Standards for England was a useful contribution and that it could be taken into consideration in the development of future partnership arrangements.

In discussion, the Standards for England template was generally supported although some members of the Committee felt that there was a risk that members of the public

contributing to partnership arrangements on a voluntary basis might find the protocol overly bureaucratic and constraining. The Chairman suggested that if it was felt necessary, the draft could be given further consideration by a sub group of the Committee.

Eric Davies referred to page 11 of the Agenda and the suggestion made by Standards for England in their guidance on the protocol template that Standards Committee's could potentially mediate between partners in the event of a dispute. Kevin Jacob commented that it was for the Committee to come to a view on the role it saw for itself.

After further discussion it was felt that the draft protocol was welcome, but that the intended outcomes section and extract on ethical actions were of particular value.

RESOLVED That the Committee recommends that the Standards for England draft Protocol for Local Authority Partnership Working, in particular the first and last paragraph, be taken into consideration by the Council in the development of future partnership working arrangements.

21. FUTURE OF THE LOCAL STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Chairman commented that he had asked for the item to be included within the meetings Agenda to allow for a discussion amongst the Committee as to the future of the Committee in light of the Government's intention to abolish the 'Standards Regime'.

Kevin Jacob and Colin Lawley commented that following the publication of the Agenda, Standards for England had produced their latest Bulletin which set out the latest position in respect of the Government's plans and changes in Standards for England business plan.

The Committee was informed that primary legislation would be required to abolish Standards for England and it was not expected that final closure would take place until between December 2011 and March 2012. It was anticipated that the necessary provisions would be contained within the Decentralisation and Localism Bill which was due to be presented to Parliament in autumn 2010. In the mean time, the existing arrangements remained in force and Monitoring Officers and Standards Committee were expected to continue to undertake their statutory responsibilities. No further details as to the future of the Local Code of Conduct or what might replace it were known.

The Chairman commented that he had contacted the Department for Communities and Local Government and had been informed that an announcement on the future of the Members Code of Conduct was expected within weeks.

Eric Davies commented that it was important for the Committee as a whole, but particularly the Independent members of the Committee to discuss and come to a view as to the future, prior to any formal decision being taken by Wokingham Borough Council. His personal view was that the Code of Conduct regime was not well regarded by elected councillors.

Pauline Helliard-Symons commented that she felt that the level of internal political discussion on the Government's proposals would depend on what form they took. If the Government was prescriptive in its approach it was likely there would be less discussion than if a range of possible options were presented. She commented that her perception was that councillors across many local authorities regarded Standards for England with some antipathy on the grounds that the Code of Conduct had on many occasions been misused.

The Chairman suggested that when more information was available as to the future of the Standards Regime it would be convenient to reuse one of the dates provisionally set aside for the consideration of complaint for a further discussion. This would be primarily aimed at Independent members but all members of the Committee would be welcomed. It was noted that the next date set aside for this purpose was 20 October 2010.

John Heggadon reminded the Committee that the Chairman was due to address the next meeting of the Wokingham and District Association of Local Councils, (WDALC) in October and that it would necessary to take a view on whether to proceed with that engagement in light of any further information on the Code.

It was agreed that subject to further information on the future of the Code of Conduct becoming available, the 20 October 2010 should be set aside for an informal discussion.

These are the Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee

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