

Medway Council
MEETING OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 7 April 2010
7.00pm to 8.15pm

RECORD OF THE MEETING

PRESENT: Councillors: Burt, O'Brien, Shaw and Smith

Independent Members:

Coomber, Coulson, Dance, Jenkins and Povey

Parish Council Representatives:

Buckwell and Marsh

Substitutes:

In Attendance:	Deborah Upton	Assistant Director, Housing and Corporate Services
	Peter Holland	Committee Co-ordinator

714 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Mike Coulson was elected Chairman for this meeting.

715 RECORD OF THE MEETING

The record of the meeting held on 3 February 2010 was signed as correct subject to it being noted that Janet Gray was elected Chairman for the meeting and the first paragraph in minute 586 being corrected to read "manner " rather than "matter" and the fourth paragraph being corrected to read "now decided" and not "not decided".

716 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Janet Gray (Independent Member).

717 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Parish Councillor Buckwell with reference to agenda Item 6(D) Appointment of new Independent Members, informed the committee that he had knowledge of Fatima Shah as he had sold a property to her some years ago.

Councillor O'Brien declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6(D) Appointment of new Independent Members, as one of the proposed new

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Independent Members was a magistrate and he too was a magistrate although he noted that he had no knowledge of that person.

718 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

Discussion:

The Monitoring Officer presented the Annual Report of the Committee for the period April 2009 to March 2010. The report gave an update on Member Conduct issues, and the work of the Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer.

The Monitoring Officer asked Members to note that under paragraph 6 of the report (Members' Training and Development) she had recently completed a training session for Parish Councillors more specifically in respect of governance issues and stated that this would be reported to Council (15 April 2010).

In addition to the contents of the report the Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that Standards for England had introduced a more detailed questionnaire for Monitoring Officers to complete as their Annual Return Standards for England this year. It was noted that the results of this return would feed into the Standards for England Annual review and that they would be sharing items of notable practice with the standards community.

Members asked the Monitoring Officer if any Members of the Cabinet had standards issues as part of their Portfolio.

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that the Leader of the Council had governance as part of his portfolio.

Decision:

The Standards Committee noted the report and that a training session had been completed for Parish Councillors. The Standards Committee recommended to Full Council the Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer for consideration.

719 LATEST NEWS FROM STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND

Discussion:

The Monitoring Officer introduced a report that advised the Committee of the latest guidance published by Standards for England (SfE) and the current status of the revised Councillor Code of Conduct.

The Monitoring Officer reported that with the Committee's agreement she intended to send copies of the guidance regularly to both Parish and Medway Councillors, starting with the guidance on blogging and social networking.

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Members welcomed the guidance and agreed that it would be good practice to send both Parish and Medway Members the regular guidance notes produced by SfE.

Decision:

The Standards Committee noted the report and agreed that Standards for England guidance is regularly sent out to all Parish and Medway Members.

720 STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND'S PROPOSALS TO INTRODUCE A RISK BASED APPROACH TO INVOLVEMENT WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Discussion:

The Monitoring Officer presented a report that informed Members that Standards for England had recently announced a review of its engagement with local authorities and a move towards a risk based approach. It notified Members of these proposals in anticipation of consultation.

Members were concerned that the proposals were heavy-handed and the introduction of a traffic light system had severe implications to authorities rated as "red" but stated that they would make a full response when they had seen the formal proposals for consultation.

Decision:

The Standards Committee noted the report and agreed to make its response when the Council received the formal proposals for consultation.

721 APPOINTMENT OF NEW INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

Discussion:

The Monitoring Officer introduced a report that advised the Committee on progress in recruiting Independent Members of the Standards Committee. Members were reminded that Mr Coulson and Mr Povey had served on Medway's Standards Committee for a period in excess of the recommended two terms, as recommended by Standards for England, and would therefore be standing down as soon as their replacements had been appointed. The Committee was also informed that there had been an Independent Member vacancy for some time.

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that she had advertised for new Independent Members of the Standards Committee and had held interviews on 26 March 2010.

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that the standard of candidates interviewed had been high and therefore asked the committee to recommend to Council to appoint the following 3 new Independent Members and retain 6 Independent Members of the Committee:

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- Christopher Sanford
- Fatima Shah
- Charles Thompson

Decision:

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To note the outcome of the recent recruitment exercise for new Independent Members of the Standards Committee and agreed to retain six Independent Members of the Standards Committee and recommend to Full Council that the following candidates are appointed as Independent Members of the Standards Committee:
- Christopher Sanford
 - Fatima Shah
 - Charles Thompson
- (b) To formally place on record its thanks to Mr Coulson and Mr Povey for their valued contribution to the work of the committee since 2001.

722 WORK PROGRAMME

Discussion:

The committee was presented with a report that set out the proposed work programme for the Committee in 2010/11. Members were informed that the work programme would be kept under review and presented to each meeting of the Standards Committee. In addition the position relating to complaints considered by the Referrals Sub Committee was summarised for information only.

Members were concerned over the length of time that some investigations were taking to be completed. The Monitoring Officer responded that investigations were being completed as soon as possible and informed Members that due to resource issues she had asked an external investigator to complete the investigations in order to try to ensure that investigations are completed promptly.

The committee was informed that the draft meetings schedule had that there be proposed Standards Committee dates on both 16 June 2010 and 7 July 2010 for the forthcoming municipal year. Given the close proximity of these dates it was proposed that the 16 June be cancelled.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to:

- (a) Approve the proposed work programme for 2010/11

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- (b) To cancel the Standards Committee meeting currently scheduled for 16 June 2010
- (c) To note the position on complaints referred for investigation by the referrals Sub Committee

Chairman

Date:

Peter Holland, Committee Co-ordinator

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