

Standards Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2011

Present: Independent Co-opted Member Mr J Snadden – in the Chair
City Councillors: A Burns, A Firth, D Sandiford, A Trotman and K Whitmore.
Ringway Parish Councillors: C O'Donovan
Independent Co-opted Members: Mrs E Carmichael and Mrs A Isles

ST/11/01 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the committee meeting held on 22 November 2010 as a correct record.

ST/11/02 The Future of the Standards Board Regime (Minute ST/10/11)

The Committee received a further update from the City Solicitor on the proposed change to the standards and code of conduct regime explaining the content of the Localism Bill that had been introduced to Parliament and published in December 2010. The report explained the proposed abolition of the mandatory components of the Standards Board regime, allowing Councils to have a voluntary code of conduct and local means of investigating and dealing with complaints that the code had been breached.

The report also dealt with the proposal to make it a criminal offence for a member to fail to declare and register an interest, if they take part in any Council business that interest relates to.

Members noted the proposals and discussed how they would affect the role of the independent members of the Standards Committee. It was explained that in its present form the Bill did allow for independent members to be co-opted onto a future voluntary Standards Committee, but not for them to vote in the decisions that committee might be taking when dealing with complaints about breaches of a local voluntary code of conduct. Members felt that the independent members make a valuable contribution to the maintenance of high standards of conduct in the Council, and help engender public confidence that the Committee's decisions are not politically determined. Officers were not able to answer if the affect on independent members represented the Government's intentions or was an oversight when the Bill had been drafted. Officers were asked to seek clarification. It was agreed that the committee's representations should be made to Government that Councils should, at their discretion, be able to continue to have independent voting members on future local standard committees that Councils resolved to set up.

Once the Government's intentions had been clarified then the Committee would consider if it should report to Council on what sort of future arrangements might be applicable in Manchester. That consideration would take into account the previous systems that operated before the Standards Board for England was set up.

Decisions

1. To note the report
2. To request that the City Solicitor seeks clarification from Government of the intended future role of independent members.
3. To request that the City Solicitor make representations to Government on behalf of the Committee that the Localism Bill should make provision for Councils to have the discretion to appoint independent voting members to their local standards committees.