

Standards Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 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 17 January 2011 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. 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. It was explained that no reply had yet been received to the letters sent to government following the Committee's January meeting.

The report also explained the proposals 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 felt that some discretion for Councils to deal with minor matters would be helpful, but noted that the proposals had all issues from the most minor to the most serious classed as potential criminal offences, with a report to the police being necessary. Without some discretion the role of Standards Committees in considering complaints about the non-declaration of interests would be greatly reduced, and it was thought that Standards Committees were likely to be better able than the police to deal quickly with less serious cases. Also, so that offences did not arise from a misinterpretation of the regulations, Members agreed that the new regulations had to be clear and explicit about the interests members must declare.

The Committee considered how a voluntary standards and conduct regime might operate in practice for matters not relating to members' interests. Further discussion took place around whether a voluntary code of conduct could be agreed for Councillors in Manchester and what sanctions might exist to deal with breaches of such a code. Members felt that there was a risk that anyone intent on wrongdoing might ignore a local voluntary standards regime unless proper sanctions existed. Again, it was agreed that the future role of Standards Committees must be clearly defined in the legislation and regulations.

It was explained that the Local Government Association (LGA) was leading on the work with government to define the future standards regime and the content of the

guidance. Therefore it was important that the Committee's concerns were put to the LGA as well as to government.

Decisions

1. To request that the City Solicitor write to the LGA to express the Committee's concerns; to seek clarification of the future role of Standards Committees' independent members; to stress the importance of the future role of Standards Committees being properly defined; and to emphasise the importance of clarity about the interests Members will be required to declare.
2. To request that officers circulate the response received.

ST/11/03 Panel Meeting Dates 2011-2012

A report was submitted proposing future dates for subcommittee (Panel) meetings.

Decision

To approve the panel dates as proposed in the report:

Panel A = Mr Snadden Chair

Councillors Burns* and Whitmore (*Councillor Trotman as substitute)

Panel B = Mrs Carmichael, Chair

Councillors O'Callaghan* and Sandiford (*Councillor Trotman as substitute)

Panel C = Mrs Isles, Chair

Councillors Evans* and Firth (*Councillor Trotman as substitute)

Cycle 2

Panel A	12 September 2011 (prior to the Standards Committee)
Panel B	26 September 2011 (10.30)
Panel C	10 October 2011 (10.30)

Cycle 3

Panel A	21 November 2011 (prior to the Standards Committee)
Panel B	5 December 2011 (10.30)
Panel C	19 December 2011(10.30)

Cycle 4

Panel A	16 January 2012 (prior to the Standards Committee)
Panel B	30 January 2012 (10.30)
Panel C	13 February 2012 (10.30)

Cycle 5

Panel A	12 March 2012 (prior to the Standards Committee)
Panel B	19 March 2012 (10.30)
Panel C	26 March 2012 (10.30)