



# STANDARDS COMMITTEE

## —Minutes—

**29 OCTOBER 2007**

**Members Present:**

Mr. Steven Moussavi (Chairman)  
Ms Grace Moody-Stuart  
Councillor Nicholas Botterill  
Councillor Donald Johnson  
Councillor Lisa Homan

**Officers in attendance:**

Michael Cogher, Head of Legal Services & Deputy MO  
Kayode Adewumi, Head of Councillors' Services  
John Cheong, Principal Committee Co-ordinator

| ITEM   |  | ACTION                 |
|--------|--|------------------------|
| Item 1 | <b><u>MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD ON 30 JULY 2007</u></b>   |                        |
|        | <b><u>RESOLVED</u></b> - That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2007 be agreed and signed as an accurate record.                                | <b>ACE/JPC to note</b> |
| Item 2 | <b><u>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u></b>  |                        |
|        | Apologies for absence were received from Mr. Christopher Troke, Independent Member, and Lesley Courcouf, Assistant Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer. | <b>ACE/JPC to note</b> |
| Item 3 | <b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</u></b>   |                        |
|        | There were no declarations of interest made by members at this meeting of the Committee.   |                        |

Item 4 **6<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES  
15 & 16 OCTOBER 2007**

The Chairman, Mr. Moussavi, introduced the item. He apologised to the Committee for not being able to attend the conference himself due to a domestic accident. Mr. Troke had attended but unfortunately he was abroad today. In his absence however, he had submitted relevant papers from the Conference for circulation for Members' information.

The conference speech of Patricia Hughes, Deputy Chair of the Standards Board for England highlighted the main issues. It was pointed out that local authorities would have to advertise the existence of the local filter and Members' Code to the wider public, and also set up mechanisms to filter complaints, and to deal with the various stages of the investigation process. It was likely several Sub-Committees would need to be established, each of which would need to have at least one independent member present in order to be quorate. This would present a problem for the current Committee as the 3 independents could be overstretched unless more independent members were appointed. An appeal mechanism would also need to be set up for those complaints where it was decided not to investigate a complaint further. One further issue would be the need to submit quarterly and annual statistical reports to the Standards Board.

Members stated that publicity on the Standards Committee had already been given in the Council's newspaper recently and were apprehensive of greater publicity without explicit caveats being spelt out as to what sort of complaints could or could not be considered, as from experience, it was highly likely many would be spurious complaints unrelated to breaches of the Code. It was suggested that once the relevant legislation was approved, an advertisement should be placed on the Council's website at the appropriate time.

It was suggested that, as part of Members' training, the Committee could view the Standards Board DVD training video at its next meeting in January 2008.

ACE (KA/DB)

Councillor Homan enquired whether the Head of Legal Services had received a large number of requests for advice relating to the Code since its introduction. HLS confirmed that he had received a regular number of requests, mostly in relation to Planning and Licensing issues. It was anticipated that, as a result of changes in the Code, new requests would be forthcoming on issues such as disclosure of confidential information in the public interest

**RESOLVED:** That the PowerPoint presentation on the new Members' Code of Conduct be noted.

Item 5 **STANDARDS COMMITTEE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MEMBERS – THE NEW CODE OF CONDUCT**

The Committee considered a questionnaire designed to test Members' knowledge of the operation of the new code of conduct. It was noted that the results, which would be reported back in January 2008, would be used as a tool to raise standards amongst Members through awareness and extra training in identified areas of need. Once the training areas had been identified, repeated messages would be sent out with reminder literature on the subject areas.

The Members who had attempted the questionnaires queried some of the questions but felt they would be a good training tool. An extra question was requested on the role of the Standards Committee. Officers were also requested to explore publishing the questionnaire via the website. It was noted that it would cost around £700 to do so. Although this method would be explored, if a more cost effective method could be found, this alternative would be used. It was agreed that the Whips should be requested to ensure that all Members complete the questionnaire.

**RESOLVED:** That the questionnaire be circulated to all Members for completion and the results be presented to the next meeting in January 2008.

**ACE(DB)**

Item 6 **THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH BILL – UPDATE**

The Committee received an update report on the progress of the above Bill. The report outlined options for how the Committee could organise itself to best deal with local determinations and hearings of complaints under the Members' Code of Conduct, following the anticipated change in legislation. The Committee considered the key processes which the council would need to plan for and organise particularly the need to accommodate at least one independent member of the Standards Committee on each of the decision-making body within the complaint process.

In anticipation of the regulations which were likely to come into effect by May 2008, it was agreed:

- that an independent Member should sit on each Local Filter Panel,
- to seek an additional Independent Standards Committee Member,
- to discuss with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea the possibility of joint working,
- to share experience with other Boroughs through networking events, and
- that the Assistant Chief Executive bring back detailed proposals, to the next meeting of the Committee.

**RESOLVED:-**

1. That the Membership of the Standards Committee be increased by one independent member at a date to be fixed by Council at a future meeting, **ACE**
2. That the Assistant Chief Executive be authorised to advertise for an additional member and that applications be considered by the Standards Committee Appointment Panel,
3. That the Council receive a further report and recommendations from the Standards Committee in relation to its function in the new year.

Item 7 **STANDARDS BOARD GUIDANCE – HEARINGS: THE ESSENTIALS**

The Committee noted the useful guidance issued by the Standards Board to Councils regarding preparation for local hearings as an aide memoire.

**RESOLVED:** That the guidance issued be noted.

Item 8     **STANDARDS BOARD FACT SHEETS**

Members noted the further guidance issued (1<sup>st</sup> October 2007) by the Standards Board to authorities on aspects of the new Code of Conduct which would help clarify some of the more complicated provisions. The fact sheets covered:- Bullying; Disclosing confidential information; Gifts & hospitality; Lobby Groups; and personal and prejudicial interests.

**RESOLVED:** That the guidance issued be noted.

Item 9     **STANDARDS COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee noted its proposed future work programme.

Item 10     **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

Meeting began : 7:00 pm

Meeting ended : 8:15 pm

CHAIR.....