

Minutes of: STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 8 July 2003

Present: Councillor J Smith (in the Chair);
Councillors K S Briggs, C M Fitzgerald, J Grimshaw,
D M Higgin and B Theckston.
Mrs A Brown, Mr J Lodge, Mr A Loyns and
Mr A Withington.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor W J Davison

Public Attendance: No members of the public in attendance.

S.277 INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Councillors K S Briggs, J Grimshaw and B Theckston to their first meeting of the Standards Committee and he also extended a welcome to Mr Aidan Loyns who had been recently appointed as the fourth independent member of the Committee.

S.278 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

S.279 ROLE OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Monitoring Officer gave an outline of the role of the Standards Committee and the responsibility of Members of the Committee.

Delegated decision:

That the report be noted.

S.280 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 March 2003, were submitted.

With regard to Minute S.1244, (Employee Car Loan Scheme), clarification was sought as to when this report would be coming back to the Audit Sub-Committee and this Committee.

Delegated decision:

That the Minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 13 March 2003, be approved and signed as a correct record.

S.281 AUDIT SUB-COMMITTEE

Delegated decision:

That the Minutes of the Audit Sub-Committee held on 5 June 2003, be noted.

S.282 INDEPENDENT MEMBERS TERM OF OFFICE

A report of the Monitoring Officer was submitted which indicated that the current Independent Members of the Standards Committee had been appointed until May 2003 and that the Council had agreed that they continue in office beyond that date but that staggered terms of office be introduced.

Members agreed to the drawing of lots as an equitable means of determining terms of office for Mrs Brown, Mr Lodge and Mr Withington.

Delegated decision:

That the terms of office for the current Independent Members be as follows:-

| | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| Ann Brown | – 1 year |
| James Lodge | – 2 years |
| Arthur Withington | – 3 years |
| Aidan Loyns | – 4 years |

S.283 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS TO AUDIT SUB-COMMITTEE AND RESOURCE SCRUTINY PANEL

Delegated decision:

That the appointment of Mr Lodge to the Audit Sub-Committee and Mr Withington to the Resource Scrutiny Panel, following a recent ballot, be confirmed.

S.284 CODE OF PRACTICE VIDEO

A video produced by the Standards Board for England was shown. The video, together with a workbook which accompanied it, were designed to help Councillors review the contents of the Code of Conduct and identify how it applied to particular aspects of their work.

Members considered that the advice of the Standards Board was not sufficiently clear in terms of lobbying planning issues and that this particular aspect of the Code should be the subject of further discussion and clarification with the Standards Board.

The Monitoring Officer indicated that she would be offering a training session to all Members using the video and the work book.

Delegated decision:

That the contents of the video be noted.

S.285 ETHICAL FRAMEWORK – UPDATE JUNE 2003

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report which informed Members of recent developments in the implementation of the Ethical Framework for Local Government pursuant to Part 3 of the Local Government Act 2000.

It was reported that the Government had now made the first part of the Regulations which enabled the Ethical Standards Officers of the Standards Board for England to refer allegations to the Standards Committee, or a Sub-Committee, for local determination once the Ethical Standards Officer had completed an investigation on the allegation. However, it was unlikely that the Standards Board would refer any cases for local determination before September 2003. A further set of Section 66 Regulations would be made later in the year, once the Local Government Bill was in force, which would enable an allegation to be referred to the Monitoring Officer before investigation of the allegation, so that the Monitoring Officer would then secure the investigation of the allegation and report to the Standards Committee or its Sub-Committee.

In view of the potential conflict of roles for the Monitoring Officer in terms of investigating allegations and advising the Standards Committee, the Greater Manchester District Secretary's Group had already discussed the possibility of establishing mutual arrangements within Greater Manchester.

Delegated decision:

That the report be noted.

S.286 DRAFT REVISED ANTI-FRAUD AND CORRUPTION STRATEGY

A draft revised Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy which had been agreed by the Audit Sub-Committee at its meeting on 5 June 2003, subject to final comments from Officers and Members and to consultation with staff representatives, was submitted.

Delegated decision:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the final Strategy be referred to this Committee at its next meeting on 30 September 2003.

S.287 INTERPRETATION OF THE PROTOCOL FOR PLANNING COMMITTEE SITE VISITS

A report of the Borough Planning and Economic Development Officer, which had been approved by the Planning Control Committee on 22 April 2002, was submitted and set out criteria and procedures for deciding upon a Committee site visit and indicated how they could be interpreted in a more specific way.

It was pointed out that the report did not amend the Code of Conduct for Probity in Planning but provided a basis upon which it could be applied by Planning Control Committee.

Concern was expressed that the wording of the interpretation to Clause 2 implied that only the member who made the initial request for the site visit would be asked to attend the site meeting. It was also suggested that members of the public who turn up to speak for or against a planning application should be made aware that a site visit may be called for.

Delegated decision:

That Planning Control Committee be recommended to ensure that all Ward Councillors are invited to attend site visits.

S.288 TIMING OF MEETINGS

Delegated decision:

That meetings of this Committee continue to meet at 7.00 pm.

S.289 INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

Mr Withington asked about the membership of the Independent Remuneration Panel and for clarification as to whether Independent Members of this Committee could now be Members of it.

Delegated decision:

That a report on this issue be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

(**NOTE:** The Chair allowed the above item to be considered as urgent business in order to enable a decision to be made in time for the next meeting of the Committee).

J SMITH
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.35 pm)