

City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council

www.bradford.gov.uk

(stamins.dot)

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held on Thursday 5 February 2009 at City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 1400
Concluded 1545

PRESENT –

Independent Persons

Mrs P Essler and Mr G Dobson

Parish and Town Council Members

Parish Councillors Bowen and Mitchell

Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
D Smith	Ferriby	Q Khan
	Ikram	

Apologies: The Very Revd Dr D Ison, Mr Shakeel, Parish Councillor Jay, Councillors Binney, Flowers and Owens

Mrs Essler in the Chair

34. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

35. MINUTES

Resolved -

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2008 be signed as a correct record.



2006-2007
Improving Rural Services
Empowering Communities



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Suzan Hemingway, Assistant Director Corporate Services (City Solicitor)



36. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals submitted by the public to review decisions to restrict documents.

37. MONITORING OFFICER'S REPORT ON COMPLAINTS

The Monitoring Officer reported to the meeting the receipt of complaints notified to her, the stage that notified complaints had reached and the final outcome on the consideration of complaints, where appropriate. The complaints reported were set out in the table shown below:

Date of Complaint	District or Parish/Town Councillor	Initial Action of Standards Committee	Current Position	Outcome
13 May 2008	District 2008/01	Initial assessment undertaken on 14 August 2008	Two issues raised. The Hearing Panel determined that one issue was not suitable for investigation or alternative action and that the second issue was to be referred to the Standards Board for England for investigation	First issue – complainant appealed to be referred to Appeals Panel, which was considered on 3 December 2008 and upheld Second issue – Standards Board for England determined no further action
29 June 2008	District 2008/02	Initial assessment undertaken on 14 August 2008	Referred to Monitoring Officer for investigation	Investigation ongoing
16 Sep 2008	District 2008/03	Initial assessment undertaken on 3 December 2008	Decision of Hearing Panel was no action to be taken	Completed
16 Sep 2008	District 2008/04	Initial assessment undertaken on 3 December 2008	Decision of Hearing Panel was no action to be taken	Completed
23 Sep 2008	Parish/Town 2008/05	Initial assessment undertaken on 3 December 2008	Referred to Monitoring Officer for investigation	Investigation ongoing
25 Sep 2008	District 2008/06	Initial assessment undertaken on 3 December 2008	Decision of Hearing Panel was no action to be taken	Completed

16 Sep 2008	District 2008/07	Initial assessment undertaken on 3 December 2008	Decision of Hearing Panel was no action to be taken	Completed
4 Dec 2008	District 2008/08	Initial assessment undertaken on 28 January 2009	Decision of Hearing Panel was to refer the matter to the Monitoring Officer for alternative action	Ongoing
17 Dec 2008	District 2008/09	Initial assessment undertaken on 4 February 2009		
19 Dec 2008	District 2008/10	Initial assessment undertaken on 28 January 2009	Decision of Hearing Panel was to refer the matter to the Monitoring Officer for alternative action	Ongoing
9 Jan 2009	District 2009/01	Initial assessment undertaken on 4 February 2009		

The Monitoring Officer pointed out that there had been ten notifications of complaints so far and that there was still almost 50% of the municipal year to run. She also noted that two complaints had been referred for alternative action, which had been a recourse that the Committee had previously viewed with some concern.

She asked Members to consider whether the information presented could be used to identify trends or to put into place measures to prevent complaints being necessary.

A Member expressed some concern that excessive emphasis on such matters, when complaints were very infrequent, could deter people from standing for office. The Monitoring Officer noted that there was already data to support that view.

The Chair considered that it was necessary to be very clear that the Committee was offering support rather than censure. It was noted that clear support was offered to officers but not necessarily to Members.

Another Member noted that some Members did suffer from abusive or aggressive contact from the public and that guidance on how to deal with that would be welcomed. A Parish/Town Councillor concurred with that as he considered the potential for such a situation was higher for his parish colleagues as they had no group support.

Members discussed the level of information that could be put into the public domain in respect of complaints and noted that, should a complaint progress to a hearing, the hearings panel would meet in public. The information regularly presented to Members was intended merely to give an update on the level of complaints received.

The Chair requested an analysis of the issues being complained of at some point and the Monitoring Officer undertook to discuss the matter with relevant interested parties and report back.

ACTION: *Assistant Director Corporate Services (City Solicitor)*

38. **STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

An updated copy of the Committee's work programme was appended to the agenda for Members' information.

Resolved –

That the work programme be noted.

ACTION: *Assistant Director Corporate Services (City Solicitor)*

39. **ETHICAL GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS AND THE AUDIT COMMISSION'S COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT**

The Assistant Director Corporate Services (City Solicitor) presented two reports:-

- (i) (**Document "I"**) inviting Standards Committee members to consider the Ethical Governance Inspection regime and specifically the key lines of enquiry for a Corporate Governance Inspection by the Audit Commission.
- (ii) (**Document "J"**) inviting Standards Committee members to consider issues arising from the outcome of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment undertaken in June 2008 specifically relating to Ethical Governance and the role of the Standards Committee.

The Chair invited her colleague Members to discuss the issues in both documents together as they were closely linked.

The Monitoring Officer concurred with that, reminding Members that it was important to maintain high standards of behaviour from Members and Officers or the framework within which the Council worked could be called into question.

Having already examined both the key lines of enquiry in Document "I" and the comments in the comprehensive performance assessment attached to Document "J", she considered that Bradford had no immediate cause for concern but advised that steps must be taken to ensure present standards were maintained and that the Council's direction of travel was appropriate. She raised the issue of Member development as a topic for consideration as weakness in that area could lead to issues that may be referred to this Committee as complaints.

A Member advised that, when she had been first elected, she had not benefited fully from the training on offer as it had been made available so soon after the election that it was overwhelming. Another Member concurred with that and pointed out that different methods of training provision suited different people's needs.

Members also noted that it was difficult for new Members who had other employment to get time off to attend training immediately after they had spent time campaigning.

Members also advised that it was important to consider the needs of other Members, as well as the newly elected, as they comprised the majority of District or Parish/Town Councils and as it was sometimes difficult to identify relevant training needs until a Member was more experienced.

The Monitoring Officer then asked whether Members wished to consider the officer/member protocol and whether that should be reviewed. Members considered that it would be useful to have a specific contact in each Directorate so that requests for information could be dealt with quickly.

The Chair advised that, at the recent SBE conference, it had been stated that an Authority with good processes for contact was considered to be a better performing Authority. It was her ambition to promote ethical governance to such an extent that the Committee could act as a "guide dog" not a "guard dog".

Another Member raised the issue of partnerships between the Council and other organisations where work needed to be done so that officers from partner organisations appreciated the rôle of Members.

Members discussed the general principles of contact with officers and considered that it was important that all Members should work in an atmosphere of mutual respect. To that end, it was considered important that the rôle of Members and their legitimate concerns be explained to officers.

A parish/town council representative also raised the issue of the parish charter as an area where member/officer contact could be improved.

Members then referred to the register of interests and the register of gifts and hospitality where some work could be done, but with the joint caveat of the need to be politically sensitive and to focus discussion on this Committee's remit.

The Chair reminded everyone of this Committee's independent remit and its tradition of transcending political differences. She went on to suggest two more topics for future discussion:

- (i) procurement
- (ii) interaction with the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee

A parish/town council representative also raised the issue of the lack of thought given to parish councils in the CPA document and the importance of fostering good working relationships between District and Parish Councils.

The Monitoring Officer accepted that point and undertook to raise it with the Audit Commission.

The Chair concluded the round table discussion by stressing the need to discuss the future resourcing of the Committee.

Resolved –

That the comments made by the Committee in respect of Documents "I" and "J" be noted and the Assistant Director, Corporate Services be requested to present a report on those issues to a future meeting of the Committee.

ACTION: Assistant Director Corporate Services (City Solicitor)

Chair

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Committee.