

City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council

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

Commenced 1400
Concluded 1530

PRESENT –

Independent Persons

Mrs P Essler, Mr G Dobson, The Very Revd Dr D J Ison and Mr M Shakeel

Parish and Town Council Members

Parish Councillors Bowen, Jay and Mitchell

Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Binney	Ferriby	Q Khan
Owens	Flowers	
D Smith		

Apologies: Councillor Ikram

Mrs Essler in the Chair

40. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

41. MINUTES

Resolved -

That, subject to the addition of apologies from Councillor Bowen, the minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2009 be signed as a correct record.



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Suzan Hemingway, Assistant Director Corporate Services (City Solicitor)



BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

42. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

43. 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, as set out in the table shown below.

Date of Complaint	District or Parish/Town Councillor	Initial Action of Standards Committee	Current Position	Outcome
29 June 2008	District 2008/02	Initial assessment undertaken on 14 August 2008	Referred to Monitoring Officer for investigation	Investigation ongoing
23 Sep 2008	Parish/Town 2008/05	Initial assessment undertaken on 3 December 2008	Referred to Monitoring Officer for investigation	Investigation ongoing
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	Decision of Hearing Panel was no action to be taken	
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	Completed
9 Jan 2009	District 2009/01	Initial assessment undertaken on 4 February 2009	Decision of Hearing Panel was no action to be taken	
10 Feb 2009	Parish/Town 2009/02	Initial assessment undertaken on 4 March 2009		

The Monitoring Officer advised that she had yet to compile the information requested at the last meeting and undertook to provide that to a future meeting.

Members discussed the procedure for dealing with complaints, noting that there was no opportunity for a subject member to insist that a matter be investigated if they wished to achieve public exoneration. If, therefore, a panel decided not to investigate and a matter was simply dropped, there was no satisfactory conclusion for the member concerned.

The Monitoring Officer concurred with members' concerns that the current process was not satisfactory and suggested that future consideration be given to making representations to the SBE to amend the first part of the hearings process to give greater clarity to all concerned.

The Chair concluded the discussion by noting that a further discussion would be had when the Monitoring Officer's report was presented.

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

44. **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: *No Action*

45. **SEVENTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES**

Previous Reference: Minute 32 (2008/09)

Document "H", which had provided information on the 7th Annual Assembly of Standards Committees held on 13 and 14 October 2008 had been considered by the Committee on 4 December 2008 and it had been resolved :

That Document "H" be noted and discussed further at the forthcoming member development event.

Members recalled that there had not been sufficient time at the subsequent member development event held in January 2009 to consider Document "H" and, therefore, the Assistant Director re-presented it at this meeting.

Various issues were raised in respect of the format of the seventh annual assembly, which included:-

- the split between workshops and strategic issues made the content of the assembly difficult to assess

- attendees tended to be Monitoring Officers and Independent Chairs, so other category members were in a minority and had limited opportunity to network
- a national conference every year seemed to be too frequent. A possible solution would be to have regional events and a shorter or less frequent national event
- the West Yorkshire Monitoring Officers considered that regional training may have been more effective and cost conscious
- attendees from Bradford concurred with that, especially as the plenary sessions had been booked in advance of the Assembly when new committee members would have had some difficulty assessing which would be most appropriate for them.

Members went on to discuss whether it was useful to continue to send delegates to future assemblies or whether it would be better to concentrate on setting up a regional networking and member development forum. It was noted that Bradford had quite a high profile at the assembly, with present and previous members and officers being asked to be keynote speakers and to be on the organisation committee. Members were very positive about the idea of a regional meeting but considered also that it was important to continue to be represented at the national assembly.

Resolved –

- (1) **That the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair, send a letter to the Standards Board for England outlining the views of the Committee on the seventh annual assembly.**
- (2) **That the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with her fellow Monitoring Officers in West Yorkshire, endeavour to provide a regional meeting of all the members of the five Standards Committees as a practically based member development and networking event.**
- (3) **That the Committee continue to be represented at the National Assembly to be held in October 2009.**

ACTION: Assistant Director, Corporate Services (City Solicitor)

46. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09

The Assistant Director Corporate Services (City Solicitor) presented the draft Annual Report attached at Appendix 1 to **Document “K”** and requested the Committee to comment on its contents.

Members considered the Annual Report carefully and requested the following clarifications/amendments:-

- that the point about political balance be moved to the section on overall composition
- that the right of a complainant to request a review of a panel's decision not to investigate be explained more clearly
- that appropriate comparators be included to set the context of complaints received in Bradford.

Members also required that the Annual Report be given sufficient publicity to promote the work of the Committee and raise its profile with the general public.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Annual Report be amended as required by the meeting and circulated as usual.
- (2) That the Annual Report also be promoted in “Community Pride” and the local media.

ACTION: Assistant Director, Corporate Services (City Solicitor)

47. IMPROVING THE ETHICAL GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Previous Reference: Minute 39 (2008/09)

On 5 February 2009, the Standards Committee had considered two reports on Ethical Governance arrangements and the Audit Commission’s Comprehensive Performance Assessment in the context of examining how the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council’s Standards Committee could improve the Ethical Governance Framework to ensure that high standards of conduct were maintained.

At that meeting, members had discussed in detail issues arising out of the reports and had identified areas for further consideration in terms of ensuring that the Ethical Governance Framework was robust and that procedures were in place to ensure continuous improvement.

The Monitoring Officer had been asked to consider the issues raised and present a further report setting out the issues and concerns and proposed actions to address those concerns.

Accordingly, **Document “L”** was now presented for Members’ consideration.

The Monitoring Officer also updated members on two recent developments since the report had been prepared:-

- (i) she had begun a series of regular meetings with the new Member Development Officer, who would also be happy to come to a meeting to talk to members
- (ii) a suggestion had been made that a telephone number be assigned for all member enquiries which would be handled via the customer call centre. All member calls would be logged onto a database which members could access. The Assistant Director, Business Transformation was happy to talk to the Committee on this point.

Members indicated their satisfaction with the recommendations in the report.

Parish Council representatives advised that there were still issues to resolve in respect of engagement with parish councils and that the issue would require discussion when it came back as a substantive item on a future agenda.

Resolved –

- (1) That the actions identified in the appendix attached to Document “L” be agreed.

- (2) That the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair, prioritise the actions identified in the appendix attached to Document "L" and map them into the Committee's work programme.

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.