

City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council

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Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held on Wednesday 21 July 2010 at City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 1400
Concluded 1510

PRESENT –

Independent Persons

The Very Revd Dr D J Ison, Mr G Dobson and Mrs A Mullen

Parish and Town Council Members

Parish Councillors Mitchell and Thompson

Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Binney	Ferriby	G Reid
Owens	Lee	
D Smith	A Thornton	

The Very Revd Dr Ison in the Chair

10. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

The Monitoring Officer disclosed a personal interest on behalf of all District Councillors present in respect of the item on the Members Register of Interests (Minute 14) as all Members were required to complete the register and keep it up to date.

As the interest was not prejudicial, all Members remained in the meeting throughout.

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



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Suzan Hemingway, Assistant Director Corporate Services (City Solicitor)



11. MINUTES

Resolved -

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2010 be signed as a correct record.

12. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

13. MONITORING OFFICER'S REPORT ON COMPLAINTS

The Monitoring Officer reported to the meeting the receipt of complaints notified to her, the stage that each complaint had reached and the final outcome on the consideration of complaints, where appropriate. She noted that no new complaints had arrived since the last meeting and that the only outstanding complaints would be assessed by the Panel at the rising of this meeting.

Members noted that advice had not yet been received from Standards for England on one complaint and indicated that the information provided by the Monitoring Officer should be updated to reflect that. The Monitoring Officer undertook to do so.

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

14. MEMBERS' REGISTER OF INTERESTS

The Assistant Director Corporate Services (City Solicitor) presented a report (**Document "A"**) which invited the Committee to consider the progress made for ensuring that the Members Register of Interests was kept up to date.

She noted that, in addition to completing or updating the register at the commencement of each municipal year, Members had a duty to update the register within 28 days of an in-year change occurring. This requirement was easy for Members to overlook.

She also advised that other Local Authorities now made their registers of interest available on line and that she was looking into whether this would be practical for Bradford, including whether it would be possible to post in-year updates. She stressed that nothing would be made available on the web which was not also available on the present hard copy register which was open for public inspection.

A Member noted that another public body on which she served updated its register as a whole more than once a year, which was helpful to Members in terms of in-year amendments.

Members discussed the possibility of issuing a reminder in order to aid Members without overburdening them with email or paper correspondence. A Member noted that all Councillors received a copy of the agenda for full Council on a regular basis and that a reminder could be appended to that.

Members also discussed the present provision for amending the register and noted that changes could be notified to the Monitoring Officer or Members' Services Officers, who also updated each other. Members praised the officers concerned for help that they currently provided.

Some Members expressed concern at the proposal to make the register electronic as there was such a difference in levels of expertise among Members in terms of using IT.

Members also examined the form appended to Document "A" and considered that, while it did accurately reflect the legislation, it could be better written in terms of plain English. It was considered that it may be difficult for new Members of Council to use for the first time.

Resolved –

- (1) That the progress made in ensuring the Register of Interests is up to date, accurate and accessible to the public be noted.**
- (2) That the Assistant Director Corporate Services (City Solicitor) be requested to consider the suggestions made by the Committee, set out below, to ensure that members are aware of their obligations and able to be compliant therewith:-**
 - **That a regular reminder to update the register of interests be provided to Members, possibly included with the agenda for meetings of Council.**
 - **That, should the register of Interests be made available electronically, consideration be given to providing Members with the facility to amend their own entries on the register.**
 - **That electronic updates be date marked.**
 - **That the register of interests form be reviewed in terms of plain English and ease of use.**

ACTION: Assistant Director Corporate Services (City Solicitor)

15. WEST YORKSHIRE REGIONAL STANDARDS CONFERENCE

Members of the Committee who had been able to attend the second annual Regional Standards Conference which had been held on 7 July 2010 were invited to give feedback on the conference.

The Committee was also requested to consider when the next conference should take place and how it should be structured.

Members were very complimentary about the Regional Conference, having found it enjoyable and informative. Their only concern was that the mock hearing had taken quite a long time.

The Monitoring Officer was very pleased to hear Members' positive comments, especially as Members who had previously attended the National Conference had found that to be overwhelming and less than useful. She took on board the concerns of Members about the mock hearing but pointed out that, in reality, the process of undertaking a hearing would necessarily be protracted. She also highlighted how important the role of the Chair

had been to the process.

A Member noted that, having attended the Conference, he had been given confidence that a regional framework would be able to cope if it should have to take on the role currently performed by Standards for England.

Members concluded the discussion by giving their support to the principle of a further regional conference, to be held in July 2011 unless changes to the national framework meant it should be held earlier in order to update all Members.

No Action

10. **ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR ENGLAND DECISIONS**

Members were invited to consider summaries of recent decisions made by the Adjudication Panel for England regarding allegations of misconduct against members which were set out in **Document "B"**.

Members noted that one of the summaries had been used at the regional conference as the basis of the mock hearing and noted that it had been an extremely complex case.

The Monitoring Officer stated that she had picked the two summaries in Document "B" as they were good examples of two sides of the same issue, namely where to set the bar before a matter became a potential breach of the Code of Conduct.

Members expressed differing views in respect of the sanction that had been levied in the first case, with some viewing the sanction as rather severe while others were in agreement with it. That difference of views led Members to debate whether a sliding scale of potential sanctions would be useful. It also highlighted the importance of the role of the Chair in leading a hearings panel through the process.

No Action

17. **STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

An updated copy of the Committee's work programme was attached for Members' information.

No Action

Chair

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

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THESE MINUTES HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER