

MEETING	STANDARDS COMMITTEE
DATE	22 OCTOBER 2010
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS HORTON (VICE-CHAIR, IN THE CHAIR), WAUDBY, HUDSON AND TAYLOR (CYC MEMBERS) MR DIXON AND MR HALL (INDEPENDENT MEMBERS) COUNCILLORS CRAWFORD, MELLORS AND FORSTER (PARISH COUNCIL MEMBERS)
APOLOGIES	MRS BAINTON AND MR WILSON (INDEPENDENT MEMBERS)

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare at this point in the meeting any personal or prejudicial interests they might have in the business on the agenda.

Cllr Taylor declared a personal, non prejudicial interest in agenda item 8 (Whistleblowing Policy), as he had made a complaint under the current Policy in the past.

12. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 25 June 2010 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

13. MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES

The minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee Assessment Sub-Committee held on 25 June 2010 were approved by the relevant members and signed by the Chair of that meeting as a correct record.

14. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

15. REVIEW OF WORK PLAN

Members reviewed the Standards Committee's work plan for the 2010/11 Municipal Year.

RESOLVED: That the work plan be noted and that no further amendments be made at this stage.

REASON: In the light of government proposals to abolish the Standards regime.

16. UPDATE ON GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS RELATING TO THE STANDARDS REGIME

Members received a report which provided further clarification of the Government's proposals, announced in May 2010, to introduce legislation to abolish the 'Standards Board regime'.

The Government intended to introduce a Decentralisation and Localism Bill during the autumn. According to a recent press release, this would include provision to abolish the entire Standards regime, including the Code of Conduct, standards committees with a power to suspend councillors, and the central body Standards for England. There would continue to be a register of interests and failing to register or declare an interest would become a criminal offence. The common law rules relating to pre-determination would be relaxed.

Members expressed regret at what they felt to be a retrograde step, which would leave parish councils, in particular, with few options to deal with issues of concern. However, they agreed that there would be little point in continuing to meet as a Standards Committee if that committee no longer had any statutory powers.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and that, if and when the Bill is enacted, this committee be disbanded.

REASON: In view of the fact that the Standards Committee would have no powers under the new legislation.

17. COMPLAINTS AND PRE-HEARING PROCEDURES

Members received a report which provided background on the time taken to process complaints received by the Standards Committee during 2009 and 2010.

Details of the time taken to process each case received since 2009 were provided in paragraph 3 of the report. It was noted that the average time for completion was around 28 working days in 2009 (not 24 as indicated in the report) and 12 in 2010, as compared to the recommended time of 20 working days. Since 2009, one investigation and one hearing had taken place; both had been completed within the required limits.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

REASON: The Committee has satisfied itself as to performance levels and, in the light of proposed changes to the standards regime, no action is required.

18. WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Members considered a report which presented an early consultation draft of a proposed new Whistleblowing Policy for the City of York Council.

A recent review of the Council's whistleblowing arrangements had identified a number of potential areas for improvement, as detailed in paragraph 2 of the report. A revised draft version taking account of these matters was attached at Annex 1.

Members were invited to indicate whether they supported the broad thrust of the suggested policy before any widespread consultation took place within the Council.

RESOLVED: That the draft policy be supported and taken forward for wider consultation, subject to the inclusion of a reference to the provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure Act.¹

REASON: The existence of a well understood Whistleblowing Policy within the Council will support good governance.

Action Required

1. Amend the policy as agreed and take it out to consultation AD

D Horton, Chair

[The meeting started at 3.05 pm and finished at 3.55 pm].