

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MEETING, 16TH MARCH, 2010

Present – Councillors Clare and Rushton.

Independent Members

Dr. R. Aston (Chairman)
Dr. R. Oxtoby
Ms. J. Parr (Vice-Chairman)

Town Council Representatives

Councillor K. Denton (Horwich Town Council)

Also in Attendance

Mr. A. Eastwood - Director of Chief Executive's
Department
Mrs. S. Bailey - Principal Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors
Hayes (Bolton Council), Seddon (Blackrod Town Council) and
Price (Westhoughton Town Council).

Dr. Aston in the Chair.

19. MINUTES

The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the
Committee held on 15th December, 2009 were submitted and
signed as a correct record.

Further to Minute 13 of the previous meeting, Mr. Eastwood
reported that the views of this Committee regarding the
Registers of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality being made
available on line had been conveyed to the Council's Leaders
and Whips.

Feedback received was that members felt that it was sufficient for the Register to be available to the public without being on the Council's website.

The Chairman expressed regret and disappointment that the information would not be available electronically as it would have demonstrated the Council's commitment to openness and transparency .

Resolved – That the disappointment of this Committee that the Gifts and Hospitality Register are not be available for inspection on-line, be conveyed to the Council's Whips and Leaders.

20. STANDARDS BOARD BULLETINS

The Director of Chief Executive's Department submitted a report which put forward the latest information bulletins published by the Standards Board for England.

Particular reference was made to:-

- a) an on-line guide available on the Standards for England regarding the complex area of bias, predetermination and the Code;
- b) the Governance Toolkit for Parish and Town Councils had been updated – it had been passed on to Bolton's Town Councils;
- c) three places had been reserved for attendance at the 2010 Annual Assembly of Standards Committees "A Place for Standards" – the Chairman and Vice-Chairman had expressed interest in attending;
- d) decision notices following hearings would now be sent to Standards for England for their information;
- e) a new assessment process adopted by the Standards for England to rate Standards

Committees into low, medium or high risk categories – Bolton had not been assessed as yet;

- f) a report was being prepared for submission to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources regarding the possible use of social networking sites by Elected Members in order to improve communication; and
- g) the launch of the Standards for England Forum where views could be expressed and issues shared.

Resolved – That the bulletins be noted.

21. FREEMASONS AND THE CODE OF CONDUCT

The Director of Chief Executive's Department updated members on an issue regarding membership of the Freemasons and the need to register of a personal interest.

Clarification had been received from Standards for England that only those Freemasons who were a member of a Lodge with Charitable Status were required to declare a personal interest. Simple Lodge membership did not require registration of a personal interest.

This advice was in line with the requirement for any person belonging to a Charitable Organisation to declare a personal interest.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

22. ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

The Director of Chief Executive's Department submitted a report which put forward a paper produced by Professor Hamilton, University of Hull, and Dr. Macauley, Teesside University, on research into notable practice by standards

committees.

Examples and case studies from nine standards committees were cited. In each case, the standards committees had demonstrated a number of innovative practices.

The research findings should not be viewed as a recommendation for all authorities to emulate but were examples of notable practice which worked in specific instances with specific authorities.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

23. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved - That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in paragraph 7a of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act; and that it be deemed that, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in its exemption outweighs the public interest in its disclosure.

24. UPDATE ON COMPLAINTS

The Director of Chief Executive's Department gave a brief overview of the complaints received to date.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

(The meeting started at 4.00pm and finished 4.35pm)