

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Standards Committee was held on 8 December 2009.

PRESENT: G Fell (Chair)
Councillors Carter, Davison, Elder, C Hobson, Khan and McPartland
Independent Member: Prof. B Footitt
Parish Council Member: Councillor I Bruce

OFFICERS: M Braithwaite, C Davies and R G Long

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillor Taylor and Mr C Nestor.

****DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest at this point of the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 8 September 2009 were taken as read and approved as a correct record subject to the addition of Prof. B Footitt to the list of those in attendance.

**** MATTERS ARISING**Tees Valley Independent Members Forum

Professor Footitt provided an update on the following issues covered at the above meeting hosted by Redcar and Cleveland Council and attended by himself and Mr Nestor:

- Joint Working between Tees Valley authorities including joint mandatory training sessions
- Sharing of Independent Members for politically sensitive complaints cases;
- Role of Standards Committees in monitoring of ethical standards within other Council partnerships e.g. Local Strategic Partnerships;
- Ethical Audits

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services advised that Stockton Council would host the next joint meeting.

Standards Conference

Reference was made to the Standards Conference held in Birmingham in October attended by Councillor Bruce and an officer of the Council. In order to update Members on the main issues addressed at the conference, a report would be submitted to the next meeting.

NOTED**LOCAL PROTOCOLS – MONITORING OFFICER/LEGAL ADVICE**

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services presented copies of two local protocols agreed between the Tees Valley Authorities. The protocols related to the use of another Tees Valley authority's monitoring officer where the main authority's monitoring officer or deputy monitoring officer had a conflict of interest and were unable to carry out duties in relation to Code of Conduct matters including investigations. The protocols would be incorporated within part 7 of the Constitution.

NOTED**PURDAH ADVICE – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1986**

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services tabled a report setting out guidance which would be provided to all Members on the relevant provisions of the Local Government Act 1986 dealing

with rules relating to publicity and the publication of material. The rules, which apply particularly during the period leading up to an election known as Purdah, are as follows:

- (a) A prohibition on local authorities publishing any material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party;
- (b) A Code of Practice (issued by the Secretary of State under the Act) to which local authorities must have regard to in coming to any decision on publicity.

“Publicity” is defined by the 1986 Act as being “any communications, in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or to a section of the public”.

NOTED

ASSESSMENT MADE CLEAR – LOCAL ASSESSMENT OF COMPLAINTS – DVD STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND

Members of the committee viewed a DVD provided by Standards for England entitled “Assessment made Clear – Local Assessment of Complaints”. The programme was designed to help standards committee members assess complaints about elected or co-opted members. The programme provided an element of training and explored the four main stages of local assessment: pre-assessment, assessment, decision and review. The programme featured learning points identifying the criteria that guide assessment sub-committee decisions, including what should be taken into account before referring a complaint for either local or for Standards for England assessment, when it was appropriate to take no action or to consider other action.

Members expressed interest in obtaining further copies of the DVD for wider circulation to political groups.

ORDERED that additional copies of the DVD be obtained and be made available to Members.