

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

**Held on Tuesday, 8 December 2009 at 2.15 pm in
Norfolk Room, Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

PRESENT

Mr M.D. Eveling	Mr B.D Rayner
Mrs J. Jenkins (Chairman)	Mr G. Ridgway
Mr D.S. Myers	Mr F.J. Sharpe
Mrs M. Oechsle	Mr M. Whittley

In Attendance

Susan Allen	- Standards Officer
John Chinnery	- Solicitor & Standards Consultant
Pam Sayle	- Corporate Consultation and Communications Officer
Elaine Wilkes	- Senior Committee Officer

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49/09 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 October 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

50/09 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr. D. Williams and Mrs. M. O'Mahony, Director of Organisation Development & Monitoring Officer.

51/09 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

52/09 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

53/09 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING

None present.

54/09 CITIZENS' PANEL (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The Communications and Consultation Officer was in attendance for this item to give advice on the Citizens' Panel and how the Committee might make use of it to carry out a survey into public awareness and understanding of the work of the Standards Committee.

Members were informed about the management of the Citizens' Panel, its composition and how surveys are carried out, as well as the types of questions that could be asked and the benefits of such surveys. An information sheet was circulated at the meeting.

Valid areas for questions through a Citizens' Panel survey that the Committee might raise included:

- To find out if people know about the existence of the Standards Committee and understand how it works
- To find out if they know they can lodge complaints and how to do so
- To find out if they are aware that local councils are governed by a Code of Conduct
- To find out if they wish, or know how, to learn more about the Committee

Members were informed that an article was being prepared for Breckland Voice which would be published before the next Citizens' Panel survey and could, therefore, act as a precursor to the survey.

The Chairman asked whether there was any benefit in conducting a county-wide survey, as all authorities had Standards Committees and a recent Standards for England report indicated that only 19% of people nationally knew about standards committees. The Communications and Consultation Officer undertook to make enquiries of Norfolk County Council as to the possibility of a county-wide survey.

The Committee concluded that a survey through the Citizens' Panel would be a useful tool for promoting public awareness on standards and it was accordingly

RESOLVED to participate in the next Citizens' Panel survey and that the officers be asked to formulate suitable questions covering the areas as suggested above for approval at the next meeting of the Committee.

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55/09 LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY - CODE OF PRACTICE (AGENDA ITEM 7)

As requested at the last meeting (Minute 42/09), the Committee looked at the revised style of the Breckland Voice magazine.

Members were pleased to note the new layout and style of content, which they felt gave a better illustration of the work being done by the Council, with good explanatory information.

56/09 DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2009-11 (AGENDA ITEM 8)

Consideration was given to a draft work programme for the Committee for the forthcoming year.

So far as the topic of liaison was concerned, the Chairman sought Members' views on the preferred approach to be taken, i.e. for the Chairman to meet informally with the Members of the Executive Board or for a more formal joint discussion between the Standards Committee and the Cabinet.

Members were of the view that a joint meeting with the Cabinet was the more desirable approach.

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It was suggested it would be helpful for that purpose to indicate the topics for discussion, for example items drawn from the work programme (such as furthering a better understanding of the work of the Standards Committee in the Council).

It was also suggested it would be useful to be able to explain why it was important that Standards Committee Members should attend various Council meetings, as this was the best way to ensure that they had a good understanding of the working of the Council and its Committees. Such an understanding was necessary given that the Members of the Committee were on occasion called to judge matters and they therefore needed to understand the processes involved. In this regard, an idea was put forward to draw up a programme for attendance at other meetings by Standards Members.

Various amendments to the work programme were made, including:

- Committee Role: Item 2: Method: Amend to "Standards Members to attend other Council meetings".
- Committee Role: Add new item 3: To inform members of the Council on the work of the Standards Committee. Method: Produce regular standards articles in the Members Information Bulletin.

It was noted that an article for the March edition of Breckland Voice was in preparation. A copy of the draft article would be provided at the Committee's next meeting on 2nd February, which would include a photograph of the Members of the Committee with accompanying text to explain what the Committee does.

It was agreed to invite a representative from the Norfolk Association of Local Councils to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss any opportunities for joint working on raising awareness and engagement on standards at the parish council level.

A suggestion was also made to see if there was any scope for a joint approach on raising awareness of standards through the Norfolk network of Monitoring Officers.

RESOLVED that

- (1) a joint meeting be sought with the Cabinet at which issues of liaison between Standards Members and Members of the Council can be discussed, with a view to fostering a better understanding of the work of the Committee in the Council along the lines indicated above;
- (2) the work programme, as amended, be included on future agenda as a standing item;
- (3) an invitation be extended to the Norfolk Association of Local Councils for a representative to attend a future meeting of the Committee;

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- (4) the Standards Consultant be asked to seek views through the Norfolk Monitoring Officers network on a possible joint approach to raising awareness of standards among local councils.

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57/09 NEXT MEETING

The arrangements for the next meeting on 2 February 2010 were noted.

The meeting closed at 3.55 pm

CHAIRMAN