

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

**Held on Tuesday, 13 July 2010 at 2.15 pm in
Norfolk Room, Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

PRESENT

Mr M.D. Eveling JP
Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mr G. Ridgway

Mr F.J. Sharpe
Mr M. Whittley

In Attendance

Susan Allen
Dominic Chessum
John Chinnery
Helen McAleer
Stephen McGrath
Maxine O'Mahony

- Standards Officer
- Marketing & Communications Officer
- Solicitor & Standards Consultant
- Senior Committee Officer
- Member Services Manager
- Director of Organisational Development

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Chairman

In the absence of the Chairman, nominations were invited.

RESOLVED that Mr Eveling be appointed chairman for the meeting.

Mr Eveling in the Chair

46/10 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

47/10 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Mrs J Jenkins, Mrs M Oechsle, Mr B Rayner and Mr D Williams.

48/10 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Mr Eveling and Mr Ridgway declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 7 (Terms of Reference of Standards Committee Members).

49/10 ENGAGING WITH THE PUBLIC THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Dominic Chessum, Marketing & Communications Officer gave Members a presentation on the use of Social Media to engage with the public.

The first slide was a live feed to a monitoring site which showed the numbers of people using various Social Media sites, e-mail, blogs, etc. It clearly demonstrated the speed at which such sites were growing and the huge numbers of users.

He suggested that Members could use the web as a tool to get messages out to their constituents and to the wider public.

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The different sorts of Social Media sites were explained. These included:

- Facebook – the most prevalent site, and one which had the option of security settings;
- Twitter – a completely public site which limited messages to 140 characters;
- LinkedIn – a business tool;
- Myspace – which used to be the most popular, but had been overtaken by Facebook;
- Foursquare – a very recent site, a sort of on-line computer game;
- Googlebuzz – another new site, but not proving very popular.

A Member asked why some sites were more popular than others and asked if any payment was involved.

The sites were funded through advertising and their stock value. Social Media was a fast moving market and if sites failed to react to what users wanted, they quickly lost popularity.

Social Media was defined as on-line interaction using text, photographs and videos. Members would need to think carefully what they wanted to use Social Media for. This could include photo-sharing, blogging, micro-blogging and/or the use of chat-rooms to hold on-line surgeries.

Examples of Councillors already using Social Media sites were shown. They were using their sites to present their human side, and also to publish formal pieces of work on current issues, or to ask for their constituents' opinions and to engage in discussions.

Members were encouraged to look at various sites before making a decision about using Social Media. They should be aware of how much time they would need to keep their site up-to-date, and how regularly they would be willing/able to check it. They were also advised to have a strategy to deal with negativity and to beware of being baited.

To talk on-line, Members would need to learn the etiquette of sites. They should be human, social and humorous (as they would be in face to face encounters). They should also check their privacy settings regularly. Most importantly they were advised to think before pressing the return key – as once a message was sent it was out of their control, in the public domain and not retractable.

Members wondered how people, particularly Government Ministers, found the time to be constantly updating their Twitter or blog sites. Dominic said that it did not take as long as they thought and that 'dead time' such as time spent travelling or waiting for meetings to start, could be used.

The Solicitor and Standards Consultant noted that an addendum, relating to the Code of Conduct, had been included when Dominic had given the presentation to Members and Officers.

The Chairman thanked Dominic for a very interesting and well presented item.

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50/10 TERMS OF OFFICE OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Chairman asked the Solicitor's views on the conflict of interest caused by the need for Independent Members to be in attendance and for an Independent Member to Chair the meeting.

The Solicitor confirmed that the Chairman had to be an Independent Member and it was noted that the two Independent Members had declared a personal interest.

He then presented his report which explained the existing terms of office of the members of the Standards Committee and suggested a clarification of those terms for the future.

No change to the terms of District Councillors was proposed, as these were elected annually by the Council.

The Parish Councillors had been appointed up until May 2011 (a four year term) and guidance suggested that no more than two terms should be served. It was suggested that if the Committee considered it important to retain the experience of these members, they should be re-elected for a further term. Currently no end-date was specified.

Members were concerned that if all three Parish members were re-appointed for a further term it would still mean that all their expertise would be lost at the end of that time. It was suggested that some means of staggering the appointments should be sought.

It was proposed that if Members were re-elected at the elections in May, new shorter terms of appointment should be introduced to prevent all three parish members finishing at the same time. In the interim, the term of existing members could be extended to provide cover until new members were appointed.

The terms of Independent Members was then discussed. Joan Jenkins had been appointed in 2004, for three years. That appointment had been renewed (for a further three years) which meant she was either due to stand down or her term would need to be extended.

It seemed reasonable to suggest that she be extended to the standard four year term and this was endorsed by the Members.

The other two Independent Members did not have a specified end-date. They were not due to finish at the same time as Joan Jenkins, but would finish at the same time as each other. It was suggested that one of them should volunteer to take a further three years and the other four years, to ensure that experience was maintained.

Mr Eveling recalled that at his interview his term was stated as likely to be for three years only and Mr Ridgway agreed that he remembered the same, although no particular term had been stipulated in the Council minutes.

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL that the terms of office of the members of the Standards Committee be agreed as follows:

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- (1) District Members continue to be appointed annually.
- (2) The existing three Parish Members are considered for re-appointment in May 2011, if they are re-elected and willing to stand. This will preserve the experience they are building up in dealing with Standards matters and complaints. Following the elections, discussions should take place to consider a staggered change-over of members. In order to cover the period immediately after the election, the term of office of the three existing Parish Members be confirmed (if re-elected) until the end of November 2011.
- (3) It is important that the Council does not lose all of the experienced Independent Members at the same time, as the Committee and Sub-Committees all have to be Chaired by an Independent Member. It is therefore suggested that:
 - a. the term of office of Joan Jenkins is extended to May 2011;
 - b. the terms of office of George Ridgway and Michael Eveling are confirmed to be until May 2012; and
 - c. further discussions should take place to consider ways to facilitate a staggered change-over of Independent Members in future.

51/10 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN'S ANNUAL REVIEW OF BRECKLAND COUNCIL 2009/10 (FOR INFORMATION)

Members were pleased with the Ombudsman's report.

The item was noted.

52/10 TOWN AND PARISH COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

The Standards Officer had completed the Newsletter and sent a copy to all Town and Parish Councils Clerks with a note asking if they would like to receive it by e-mail in future.

Only one response had been received and the Standards Officer was uncertain whether the Clerks were actually circulating the copy to their members.

The Parish Members on the Committee agreed to check this with their clerks, but one suggested that a lack of response did not necessarily mean a lack of interest.

The Solicitor noted that he had been asked to talk to the Norfolk Association of Local Councils (NALC) about the possibility of joint training sessions. He had heard about one such session arranged with North Norfolk at which the Code of Conduct, Standards and Audit had been discussed. He asked for the Committee's approval to proceed to talk to NALC to arrange something similar and this was agreed.

John
Chinnery

53/10 STANDARDS POSTER

The Standards Officer told Members that she had visited Swaffham High School and explained the aim of the poster to some staff and

students there. She had given them a copy of the Code of Conduct for reference.

The teachers had seemed enthusiastic and one had said that posters would be sent in by 23 July 2010, when the school closed for the summer holidays.

The Standards Officer had also attempted to make contact with schools in the other towns but no interest had been shown.

54/10 VISITS TO DISTRICT COUNCIL MEETINGS

Mr Whittley updated Members on his visit to Development Control Committee on Monday 21 June 2010.

He had used the proforma provided by the Standards Officer to note his comments and had found this very useful.

The Members of the Committee had treated each other with respect and the Chairman had done well in exercising control when necessary. Mr Whittley thought that Members had generally acted very well and he said it had been a good meeting to go to.

55/10 APPLICATION FOR DISPENSATION - DEREHAM TOWN COUNCIL

The Standards Officer asked Members to note that it was a Community Car scheme referred to in the report (not Community Care as it appeared in some places).

The Solicitor told Members that the quorum for Dereham Town Council was six and therefore they would not be able to discuss the items noted without a dispensation. He advised them that if they were minded to grant the dispensation they had the option to permit Members with an interest to speak only, vote only or speak and vote.

RESOLVED to grant a dispensation to Phillip Duigan, Michael Fanthorpe, Robin Goreham, John Gretton, Michael Griffin, Kate Millbank, Linda Monument and Lynda Turner, of Dereham Town Council, to speak and vote in connection with the following, up to the next elections in May 2011:

- 1). Transfer of play areas and open spaces from Breckland Council;
- 2). Community Car Scheme funding agreements with Breckland Council; and
- 3). Matters relating to Breckland District Council's management of the Neatherd Common.

56/10 NEXT MEETING

The arrangements for the next meeting on 6 September 2010 were noted.

The meeting closed at 3.10 pm

Action By

Susan Allen

CHAIRMAN