

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

ETHICS AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

THE EARL BALDWIN SUITE, DUKE HOUSE, CLENSMORE STREET,
KIDDERMINSTER

15TH DECEMBER 2009 (6 PM)

Present:

Councillors: Mrs R L Akathiotis, Mrs H E Dyke, D R Godwin, M J Hart,
Mrs S M Hayward, C D Nicholls, K J Stokes and J Thomas.

Independent Members:

Rev J A Cox (Chairman), Mrs C A Noons (Vice-Chairman), Mr T J Hipkiss and
Mr R Reynolds.

Parish/Town Members:

Councillor R Hobson
Councillor Miss A Mace
Councillor J Swift

Observers:

There were no members present as observers.

ES.12 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P Dyke.

ES.13 Appointment of Substitutes

No substitutes were appointed.

ES.14 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

ES.15 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 13th August 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to apologies for absence being recorded for Councillor J Swift and Mrs C A Noons.

ES.16 Review of Local Determination of Complaints/Progress on the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2008

A report was considered from the Monitoring Officer that gave feedback on the local determination of complaints following the first meeting of the Council's

Assessment Sub-Committee. The meeting had gone well and all procedures appeared to work satisfactorily.

The Monitoring Officer informed Members about another meeting of the Assessment Committee that had been held on Tuesday 8th December 2009. However, she was unable to go into any further details as the business regarding this meeting had not been concluded. Members were advised that in this case the matter had been referred to her for alternative action and a report would be made to the next meeting of the Committee.

Decision: The report be noted.

ES.17 Training Requirements

A report was considered from the Monitoring Officer regarding training requirements for Members, Parish and Town Councillors.

The Monitoring Officer advised Members that it was necessary to keep training under review. Currently Members were trained at the commencement of the Municipal year.

Members were advised that consideration was being given to holding some interactive training which would build on Members' knowledge of the Code of Conduct. This training was considered to be suitable not only for longstanding Members but also for new Members.

The Principal Committee Officer informed Members that she would be contacting them shortly to arrange a date in the New Year on which to try out the new training. Members concurred that an evening session would be preferable.

Decision:

- 1. The report be noted.**
- 2. The Principal Committee Officer to contact Members to ascertain a suitable evening date for training in the New Year.**

ES.18 Motion from Council – Members' Expenses Claim Forms

A report was considered from the Monitoring Officer that informed Members of a motion that was agreed by Council on 22nd October 2009 regarding Member Expenses Claim Forms.

Copies of examples of monthly claim forms and a draft annual summary of claims were circulated round the table.

Members considered the draft copy of the annual summary and made the following comments:

- A totals column should be included to show the total amount paid to each Member.

Agenda Item No. 4

- Members who did not make a claim for their basic allowance would be highlighted.
- There should be amendments to the remarks column as follows: if a Member left the authority” instead of the word termination the words “left the authority” and the date this happened would be used.
- When a Member was newly appointed the remark column should read commenced as a Councillor and include the appropriate date.
- It was suggested that special responsibility allowances should be explained so that it was apparent to Members of the public what these allowances were for.
- The figures should promote transparency and be easily accessible on the Council’s website.
- It was perceived that the publication of these claims would stop the current level of Freedom of Information requests.
- The claims would continue to be published in a newspaper annually but the addition of this method of publication of the scheme was considered to be an enhancement.
- The publication of Members’ claims should be reviewed.

It was clarified that the summary sheet of expenses would be included on the Members’ section of the Council’s website.

Decision:

1. **The report be noted.**
2. **The summary of Members’ claims be revised to include a totals column with explanation of special responsibility allowances and Members who do not claim their basic allowance to be highlighted.**
3. **The words ‘left office’ and the date on which a Member left office to be included in the remarks column. If a Member joined the authority the remark column should read “commenced as a Councillor” and include the appropriate date.**
4. **A review of the publication of Members’ claims be held in due course.**

ES.19 Work Programme

Members considered the work programme for the rest of the Municipal Year.

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that in January 2010 to consider it was planned to consider guidance from Standards for England on the Code of

Conduct in a Member's Private Life. However, the guidance had not been published in the autumn as was originally intended and she was unsure whether it would be available for the next meeting.

The Principal Committee Officer advised Members that following the Assessment Sub-Committee's meeting on 8th December 2009, two further items had been suggested for the Ethics and Standards Committee's Work Programme. These were:

- A review of the protocol on the Disclosure of Confidential Information. (This had been suggested in view of some recent breaches of the Code of Conduct)
- A Protocol be written on the use of mobile phones in Regulatory Committees.

Members concurred with the need to include these items and it was suggested that the protocol on the use of mobile phones should be extended to all committee meetings.

Decision: The following items be included on the Committee's Work Programme:

1. **A review of the Council's protocol on the Disclosure of Confidential Information be held.**
2. **A Protocol be written on the use of mobile phones in all Committee meetings.**

ES.20 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Decision: Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of "Exempt Information" as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

ES.21 Summary of Minutes

The following proceedings were considered after the press and public had been excluded from the meeting. A summary of the minutes relating to these items has been made as "exempt information" would be disclosed if the minutes were published in full.

ES.22 Exempt Minutes

Decision: The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 13th August 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

The meeting ended at 6.40 pm.