

MINUTES of the meeting of the **STANDARDS COMMITTEE** held at 10.30am on Wednesday 20 February 2008 at County Hall, Kingston upon Thames.

These minutes will be confirmed by the Standards Committee at its next meeting on 29 April 2008.

Members:

- *+ Mr Nicolas Davies LVO JP DL (Chairman)
- * Mrs Angela Fraser DL (Vice-Chairman)

- Mr Victor Agarwal
- x+ Ms Karen Heenan
- * Mr Daniel Kee
- * Mr Geoff Marlow
- * +Mr SFI Rutter
- * Mr Chris Slyfield
- * Mrs Jean Smith

- + = Independent Representatives
- * = Present
- x = Present for part of the meeting

PART 1

IN PUBLIC

01/08 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]

There were no apologies for absence.

02/08 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 19 December 2007 [Item 2]

The minutes were agreed as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

03/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

There were no declarations of interest.

04/08 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]

There were no questions or petitions.

05/08 COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS REPORT [Item 5]

Declarations of Interest:

There were no declarations of interest.

Witnesses: (name, job title, service/organisation)

Nigel Bartlett-Twivey (Customer Relations Manager, Services for Communities)

Key Points Raised During the Discussion:

- Jean Smith's compliments from the previous meeting with regard to the improvement in customer service at her local waste depot had been passed on to Surrey Waste Management who had in turn passed the compliments on to the local site manager.
- The continuing significant improvement in Surrey Highways' complaints handling performance was highlighted.
- There was continuing concern for performance in Services for Families and while Schools and Learning had responded to 100% of complaints in quarter 3 within the target timescale it was not felt that two recorded complaints within that quarter was a realistic picture of the number of complaints received by that service. The Customer Relations Service had agreed with Services for Families that they will nominate customer relations managers to champion and promote excellence within Adults and Children's Services. This would compliment existing provision within the service and reflect the current arrangements with the Schools and Learning service. Agreement had also been reached on the Customer Relations Service reviewing the complaints process in the Schools and Learning Service with a view to identifying improvement opportunities. This work would shortly begin in Admissions and Transport.
- All service delivery plans would include complaints handling in the next year.
- The 82% target of complaints responded to within the timescale was a local target. It is regularly reviewed and next year would be set at 85%.

- There was a discussion around the scrutiny of claims for compensation due to negligence. This information was not included with the complaints handling data as the complaints process specifies that if there is another route for dealing with an issue, e.g. legal redress, that route should be taken. Claims for compensation do not fall within the remit of Standards Committee. However, compensation may be paid out to complainants to return them financially to the position they would have been in before maladministration by the Council affected them. The complainant may receive a time and trouble payment. It was felt that Corporate Management Select Committee would be the appropriate Committee to scrutinise claims for compensation due to negligence.

Recommendations:

To Nigel Bartlett-Twivey (Customer Relations Manager):

- To pass on the Committee's concerns about the continuing and worsening complaints handling performance in Services for Families.
- To pass on the Committee's compliments to services where performance has improved; in particular Surrey Highways.

Select Committee Next Steps:

- Future reports to specify that claims for compensation due to negligence are not included.

06/08 GUIDANCE FOR MEMBERS ON GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY [Item 6]

Declarations of Interest:

There were no declarations of interest.

Witnesses: (name, job title, service/organisation)

Allan Wells (Deputy Monitoring Officer, Corporate Services)

Key Points Raised During the Discussion:

- The Chairman informed the Committee of an incident at Waverley Borough Council where all Councillors had been invited to an event that members of the public were charged £16 to attend. The Councillors were also invited to a champagne lunch at the event. The Monitoring Officer at Waverley wrote to all Councillors, reminding them that if they thought the lunch would cost more than £9 they would have to declare it. In the end only the Mayor of the Council attended the event for free while others paid as members of the public did.
- The Committee was assured that only gifts and hospitality received since the new system came into effect needed to be registered under the new system.

- Members needed to use their judgement as to whether a gift or hospitality cost £25 or more. The Standards Board guidance suggested that if Councillors were in any doubt they should register the gift or hospitality.
- It was clarified that the sum concerned was '£25 or more', not 'more than £25'.
- Members were reminded that registering gifts and hospitality is not a defence against considering whether or not to accept a gift or hospitality.
- The Chairman informed the Committee that he felt it likely that the figure of £25 or more would be reviewed. He had recently spoken to members of the Standards Board for England who also felt that the figure was too low.
- Members suggested that Council could establish an approach for refusing unsolicited gifts such as the diaries many Members received from Ringway without individual Councillors having to send them back. For example, the Council could collect the gifts and send them on to charity.
- Members were concerned about how far they needed to go to establish who had sent a gift. An example was cited of a Councillor receiving a bottle of champagne from an anonymous sender. He had then gone through great efforts to establish who had sent the gift. It was suggested that perhaps Members could write to the Monitoring Officer highlighting the gift so that it can be seen that the gift has been registered as far as it could be (the source of the gift would have to be listed if it was registered in the register of interests).

Recommendations:

To Ann Charlton (Monitoring Officer):

- That the forms used to register gifts and hospitality include the examples of gifts and hospitality that are generally acceptable and those that are considered to be unacceptable as an aide memoir.
- An approach for Members to officially refuse gifts be considered.
- That the final paragraph of the proposed guidance be formatted as bold to emphasise the advice that is available.

To Council:

- To adopt the Guidance for Members on gifts and hospitality and include it in the Constitution.

07/08 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS [Item 7]

The next meeting of the Committee will be on 29 April 2008 at 10.30am.

Future meetings will be on:

25 June 2008

17 September 2008

[Meeting ended: 11.15am]

Chairman