

Newsletter – April 2009.

CURRENT ISSUES.

‘Planning Ahead’ essential for standards committees.

Friday 17 April, 2009 SBE News release. The Standards Board for England is working with local authorities to maintain an ethical approach to planning applications – by providing them with a planning game for standards committees. To find out more either e-mail press.enquiries@standardsboard.gov.uk. Or use this link <http://www.standardsboard.gov.uk/PressOffice/title,17638,en.html>

1. Feedback from Regional Co-ordinators Meeting. (Extracted from Draft Minutes).

Five members of the Association attended the meeting in Manchester on 10 March 2009

The Standards Committee (Further Provisions) (England) Regulations 2009

Emma Webb (SBE Policy Adviser) advised that the Standards Board expected the Regulations to be laid on 1 April 2009.

New Code

Anne Rehill (SBE Advice and Guidance Manager) informed the meeting that the Standards Board expects the new Code to be published around June.

Sanctions guidance

Anne Rehill informed the meeting that the Standards Board does not yet have enough data about sanctions to identify good practice, and that it would not therefore be producing guidance at present. The Standards Board’s approach now is to review all existing guidance on sanctions and reissue in one package. Anne Rehill invited anyone who wished to be involved in this process to inform her of this.

Anne Rehill provided update on the Standards Board’s new role as a strategic regulator. A risk model is being developed, which will look at specific, sectoral and systemic risks. The Standards Board intends to take a supportive, collaborative approach in working with standards committees and officers.

Bruce Claxton (South Forum) stated that a national curriculum for independent members would be extremely helpful. In particular, it would be useful to ensure that chairs of standards committees had completed the curriculum. Peter Smith (Cumbria & Lancaster) agreed.

Anne Rehill informed the meeting that the Standards Board was developing a training curriculum, to include a syllabus and training materials. This will be published in the near future and will be revised according to feedback. All comments are welcome.

Annual Assembly

Richard Scott (SBE Heads of Communications) informed the meeting that the emphasis of the 2009 Assembly would be on sharing good practice rather than the Standards Board lecturing delegates. In response to a question from Richard Stephens (Gloucestershire), he confirmed that it would be two days but the cost of attending on one day only would be reduced.

2. Recent Consultation.

The Association responded to the Consultation regarding Standing for Office: Time-Off Entitlements. The Government thanked the Association again for its response. The summary of responses which was published on 20th March, 2009 can be download via the link; <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/timeoffconsultationresponses>

The Association is referred to directly at the foot of page 8.

3. Annual Assembly.

The Association has been invited to host a Fringe Event and also to have an Exhibition Space of 2m x 2m. We will accept the invitation for these; we have three years of prior experience of hosting a Fringe Event. The exhibition space includes a table and two chairs. We will be seeking offers from members to assist at the exhibition space in due course.

Meanwhile since the Assembly has proven most popular in recent years and has in fact been sold out several weeks before the start of the event, you are encouraged to book your place early. If this is done by your authority, then experience leads to the advice, to keep the pressure on so that your authority books early to ensure your place.

4. Annual General Meeting and Training Event.

The Association is considering holding a one day training event on the same day as its Annual General Meeting. Before making arrangements and inviting expert speakers we would need to know if you would wish to come to London, mid week in November to such an event. We will need to charge a modest fee for the training to cover the hire of a hall and the costs of our expert speakers. Please advise me at an early date if this would interest you and the level of fee you or your authority would be willing to pay.

5. Local Government Award.

We congratulate Rossendale Borough Council, the winner in the Standards and Ethics category at the LGC Awards 2009, Many Standards Committees submitted bids; Leeds City Council, Lincolnshire County Council, Newark & Sherwood District Council, and Newcastle City Council were shortlisted for the final. We plan to invite the winners and other shortlisted

Standards Committees to tell their valuable stories to tell through these pages so that the rest of us may benefit.

6. Unitary Councils 2009.

The move to unitary local government in Bedfordshire, Cheshire, Cornwall, Durham, Northumberland, Shropshire and Wiltshire has been occurring with 44 local councils reduced to just nine. This has affected some of our members. We congratulate those who have been appointed to the standards committees of the new authorities. We await news of others. We will contact the chairs of the new standards committees shortly. Meanwhile if anyone has news that will interest others, particularly how the change over process has taken place and its influence on cases in the course of pre-assessment or investigation etc, please let me know.

7. Investigation timeline.

The Monitoring Officer of the Isle of Wight Council has sent for dissemination a timeline of an actual investigation. In her covering note she says “ensuring the investigations are carried out appropriately is the role of the Monitoring Officer not the Standards Committee. However, I think it is not inappropriate for the Chair of the Assessment Sub-Committee who refer a matter for investigation, to be kept aware of the outline progress of the investigation, as set out on the attached timeline, provided that the Chair will not be used in any subsequent hearings on the matter. It would be inappropriate for the members to be involved in the detail of the investigation or to seek to influence its progress/outcome in any way, and this is why the outline we have produced is anonymous.”

8. Annual Subscriptions.

Subscriptions renewals are progressing well. So far 72 subscriptions for the year commencing 1st April, 2009 have been paid in full or by part. The part payments arise because some of the Bankers Orders Forms were not changed. Some members are still uncertain as to whether or not they will be reappointed. If their reappointment date falls part way through the year, then benefit from the change to the Constitution made at the Annual General Meeting can be gained by the authority if it pays your subscription direct. To date this year 30 authorities have made direct subscription payments.

New Membership Application Forms to apply with effect from 1st April are available. Some recent applications have been on the old form.

9. Recruitment.

Recruitment is continuing. We would very much like to recruit at least one Independent Member of every eligible Standards Committee. Please help us to recruit new members. If you know of any Independent Members who are newly appointed, upgrading to the role of Chair of the Standards Committee or a sub-committee of a Standards Committee and are not yet AIMSce members then please encourage them to join us. We are seeking several

volunteers to become directors of the Association. If you feel able to give your support please come forward with your suggestions. We meet about four times a year; the rest of the work is generally done by e-mail.

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS.

Do you have one? AIMSce continues to get asked questions about all matters of concern from individual Independent Members. We welcome these. If there is something that is of concern to you, please send it in to Bruce Claxton at bruce.claxton@aimsce.org.uk Please note that Peter Rowland has not yet secured an appointment within the restructured local government in Shropshire and may therefore retire as a Director and Member of the Association in the near future.

Your contributions to the Newsletters.

Please help to spread good practice by providing information that we can publish to assist our members to benefit from the experiences of each other.

Independent Members Forums.

The following meetings have been advised:

The **Derbyshire Forum** for independent members: Date and Location not yet notified. Contact Michael Blake at Mjblake@btinternet.com.

The Yorks & The Humber Independent Members' Forum will next meet in at 2.00 pm on 28th April 2009, in Scarborough; Anne Rehill of the SBE will be the speaker. Contact Mike Wilkinson at mike.wilkinson@aimsce.org.uk.

The next meeting of the **West Mercia Forum** will be on 4th February 2009 in Ludlow at 2:00 for 2:30 pm. As well as time for discussion on matters of mutual concern, we have, as our guest speaker, Dr Robert Chilton, new chairman of the Standards Board for England. Contact Peter Rowland on peter@rowland.entadsl.com.

The **Hampshire, Isle of Wight, East Sussex, West Sussex and Surrey** Independent Members' Forum will next meet on Monday, 19 October 2009 at Arun District Council, Civic Centre, Maltravers Road, Littlehampton, BN17 5LF. Contact Bruce Claxton at bruce.claxton@aimsce.org.uk.

Bruce Claxton,

Newsletter Editor.

Chronology of investigation relating to Complaint ESC 10/08

Date	Action
11/7/08	Assessment Sub Committee decision to refer for investigation
22/7/08	Received referral for investigation
22/7/08	Investigation plan prepared
22/7/08	Initial letters prepared
24/7/08	Initial letters sent by email to both parties with time estimate of 3 months to complete investigation. Letter asked for details of witnesses/availability for interview by 7/8/08
25/7/08	E mail from Cllr M asking investigator to supply various details to him about the extent of the complaint as he was aware that Cllr PW was withdrawing part of her complaint. Cllr M refused to progress this further until clarified.
28/7/08	Further email exchange with Cllr M asking for his initial response. Again he responded asking questions of the investigator
30/7/08	After pressing, Cllr M finally agrees date for interview
1/8/08	Conversation with Cllr PW to clarify extent of complaint
6/8/08	Cllr PW replies with initial response and list witnesses
7/8/08	Interview with Cllr M
12/8/08	Interview with Cllr PW
15/8/08-1/9/08	Investigator on annual leave
5/9/08	Email to all witnesses asking for a telephone call to arrange interview
6/9/08	Arranged date to interview witness
10/9/08	Email from Cllr M with complaint that investigation not completed. Explained investigator had been on annual leave
11/9/08	Interview with witness
11/9/08	Conversation with witness who refused to be interviewed

15/9/08	Interview with witness
17/9/08	Email to a further witness asking to arrange interview
17/9/08	Conversation with witness who refused to be interviewed
19/9/08	Interview with witness
19/9/08	Interview transcripts sent to both parties for approval
19/9/08	Conversation with witness re approval of interview transcript
1/10/08	Contact from Cllr PW – transcript not approved. Asked for copy of tape
7/10/08	Phone call to Cllr PW to see if transcript approved
7/10/08	Visit from Cllr PW to listen to tape – transcript then approved
9/10/08	Email to Chris Mathews for some final details to insert into report
10/10/08	Reply to email above received.
10/10/08	Draft of report sent to Helen Miles to approve/comment on
14/10/08	Email to Helen to see if report approved
10/11/08	Meeting with Helen Miles to discuss report
12/11/08	Amendments to report
13/11/08	Draft report sent to both parties
19/11/08	Request from Cllr PW for extension on filing of final report
20/11/08	Email to Cllr PW to ask for timescale on request for extension
24/11/08	Investigator chased Cllr PW for response on draft report
24/11/08	Correspondence from Cllr PW – extension no longer required
27/11/08	Final report submitted to Monitoring Officer
12/08	Monitoring Officer reviewed report, raised queries satisfactorily resolved
22/12/08	Passed to Committee Services to set up meeting
15/01/09	Hearing and Consideration Sub-C met