

BOARD MINUTES

Meeting: Board meeting
Date: 19 March 2008
Time: 9.00am – 12.00 pm
Location: Board Room, Griffin House, Lever Street, Manchester

Attendees: Sir Anthony Holland, Chair
Patricia Hughes CBE, Deputy Chair
Paul Gott
Elizabeth Hall
Councillor Mehboob Khan
Councillor Sir Ron Watson CBE

Apologies: Councillor Shirley Flint
Professor Judy Simons

In attendance: David Prince, Chief Executive
Tim Bogan, Head of Communications
Kathy Farrand, Head of Referrals/Programme Manager
Navin Gokool, Head of Governance and Client Services
Paul Hoey, Head of Policy and Guidance
Hazel Salisbury, Director of Casework
Sara Goodwin, Head of Legal

Observers: Caroline Matthews

The Chair noted that this would be Tim Bogan's last Board meeting. The Board recorded their sincere thanks for his valuable contribution to the work of the Standards Board for England.

Item No.	Subject	Action
08/21	Apologies <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Councillor Shirley Flint▪ Professor Judy Simons	
08/22	Minutes of April Board Meeting (open session)	

The minutes were approved and signed by the Chair.

08/23 Matters Arising

There were none.

08/24 Declaration of Board member interests and forthcoming engagements

The Chair asked each Board member to declare all their interests or attendance at events

- Sir Anthony Holland
 - Had spoken at CALC (Cornwall Association of Local Councillors) on 7 February in Truro
 - On 28 March would be speaking at the SW independent members of standards committee conference in Bristol
 - On 4 April would be attending the Solicitors in Local Government dinner in Exeter
 - In the process of arranging a meeting with Nick Raynsford MP, Chair of the independent Centre for Scrutiny, and Glenys Stacey.

- Elizabeth Hall
 - Appointed Chair of the Code of Practice Working Party - Bar Standards Board
 - Invited to attend meeting of Tandridge Standards Committee – date to be agreed

08/25 Team Briefing System

The Board noted the feedback from the team briefings that took place following the 30 January – 4 February 2008 team briefing round.

The Head of the Communications Team reported that the team briefing system had now been successfully up and running for five and a half years. The Board agreed this was a very good system and should be continued.

HoC

08/26 Draft Guidance Issued by the Board to Ethical Standards Officers

The Board discussed the paper which explained the power of the Board to issue statutory guidance to Ethical Standards Officers (ESO) under section 190 (1) of the Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 with respect to their functions as set out in the Local Government Act 2000.

The Board considered the draft guidance and a number of drafting suggestions were made.

The Head of Legal was asked to re-draft the report in line with Board's discussion, and pass it for consideration to the external legal adviser

(Irwin Mitchell) who had been appointed following the recent tender process to review it and ensure that it accorded with best legal and regulatory practice.

It was agreed that the final version will then be brought back to the Board in May 2008 for approval.

SG

08/27 Officers' Code of Conduct and Related Issues

The Board discussed the report and considered whether to press more actively for the Officers' Code to be issued by Communities and Local Government, taking account of the feelings expressed on this issue by elected members during recent events and presentations by the Board. The Board also noted the recent reply to a Parliamentary Question on the issue, indicating that the Code would be produced later in the year. It was therefore agreed that the Chair should write to the Minister when he leaves the Standards Board for England in June. He should include this as one of a number of outstanding issues for Ministerial consideration and in the context of the Local Government Association's call for a unified Code at a national and local level , (referred to in paragraph14 of the report)..

PH

PH

The Board also agreed that the timing and content of the Officers' Code should also be raised at the meeting with the LGA political Leaders on 18 June.

08/28 Induction of new Board Members

The Board considered the scope, content and timing of appropriate induction arrangements for new Board members.

It was agreed that a concise note should be produced to explain in simple terms the Board's remit and operational arrangements, particularly in relation to its new regulatory role. It was noted that it was useful for non-political members to attend meetings with local authority officers and members to see how the standards framework operates in a local political context..

HoC

It was also suggested that CLG should be requested to inform interested candidates that the political members of the Board are available if prospective Board member candidates would find it useful to have a conversation with them about the role..

DP

08/29 Proposed format for Standards Board Standards Committee Award

The Board discussed the objectives and format of the Standards Board standards committee award. It would be presented to a standards committee that could demonstrate proactive delivery of a local culture of high standards, with the visible support of the leadership and active

communication with its local community.

It was noted that the award had already been approved in principle by the Board as part of the 2008/2009 communications strategy. HoC

The Board approved the recommended approach to implementing the proposal, which was linked to one of the existing well-established awards, and which set out the scope and timetable of an evaluation process.

08/30 Board and Colleague Conference 2008

The Board agreed that an event should be held, involving the new Chair and chief executive and all staff, in Manchester.

The Board agreed that the Head of Communications should identify a suitable date, recognising the difficulties around the dates of existing commitments such as Panels and stakeholder conferences. HoC

08/31 Learning from local cases

The Board received the report and noted the issues and concerns that had been expressed in relation to “no action” findings and how long they remained on the website. It was noted however that the 2007 Act had amended the 2000 Act. The findings available to Ethical Standards Officers in future would either refer to “no failure to comply with the Code” or to “a failure to comply but no action needs to be taken”. Accordingly it was recommended that the periods for case summaries to appear on the website be maintained.

It was therefore agreed:

- that the Standards Board continues to produce case summaries of only those cases that are investigated by the ethical standards officers it employs
- that the Standards Board strongly recommends that local authorities produce case summaries
- that the Standards Board issues periodic *Case Alerts* highlighting learning from cases handled both locally and centrally
- that a quarterly report is made to all authorities, via the Bulletin publication, which is also available on the web. This will give a statistical round-up of all cases and will draw learning from them

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- that further learning from cases is summarised in the Annual Review
 - that the timescales for case summaries to remain on the Standards Board's website remains as it is now.

08/32 Update on Environmental Policy

The Board noted the report summarising progress on implementation had been produced in response to a request at the previous meeting, when the policy had been approved. This reflected the Board's corporate social responsibilities and maximised use of resources..

HS

It was agreed:

- to make a commitment to the principles and actions of an environmental management system;
- to agree to the Environmental Working Group carrying out an audit between March and May 2008 to help shape the Environmental policy and implementation plan;
- to support the review of the Environmental Policy and implementation plan in light of the audit..

08/33 Revision of the Expenses Policy

It was noted that the Board needs to keep its expenses policy under review both to ensure proper use of public money and to support its business objectives.

The Board agreed the updated policy attached to the report and the rates (including the revised rates for hotels) shown in Appendix A.

The Board asked that the policy be kept under review to reflect actual business needs, and to allow exceptional individual circumstances to be taken into account when booking travel and hotels, such as economical planning for multiple commitments or medical needs, provided these were properly evidenced and documented.

NG

08/34 Appointment of Ethical Standards Officer

In view of his imminent departure the Board agreed to remove Steven Kingston as an ethical standards officer under Section 57 of the Local Government Act 2000, and to appoint Jonathan Wigmore as an Ethical Standards Officer under the same provision with immediate effect.

The Board expressed their thanks to Steve Kingston for his excellent service.

08/35 Handling allegations during elections

The Board considered the position on handling of allegations during the forthcoming election period and discussed whether any additional guidance be given through the Bulletin to local authorities on handling the local assessment process during future election periods.

The Board confirmed its previous position, subject to the Chair considering any subsequent advice received from the Cabinet Secretariat on this issue and being delegated to act as he considered appropriate in light of that guidance.

The Board also agreed to appropriate guidance around decisions to suspend a member being included within the local hearings guidance to be issued shortly

08/36 Follow up from away day – oral report

The Chief Executive summarised the actions agreed at the away day which related to the implementation of the new regulatory role. These would be circulated with a future electronic Board Bulletin, and would inform the next stages of drafting the plan.

The Board noted the recent letter from CLG which had been tabled at the meeting and provided a steer for the preparation of the 2009/12 strategic plan.

08/37 Implementation of the Strategic Framework

The Board discussed the latest progress towards implementing the strategic regulatory role.

The Board noted that the chief executive had informed CLG that on the basis of information given on the expected timing of the regulations the Board had started the closure process of the Referrals Unit. It was therefore critical that the timetable is adhered to by CLG.

The Board noted the report.

08/38 Chief Executive's Report

The Board noted that despite the Referrals Unit being under pressure from the increased number of allegations the turnaround target of ten days had been achieved in February.

The Board received the report.

It was agreed that the meeting on 21 May could begin at 10.30 a.m. as

DP

requested by Councillor Mehboob Khan.

08/39 Client Services Report

The Board noted that, following a previous comment regarding the appropriate diversity target following relocation to Manchester, a comparison had been done with other organisations across the region. It was agreed that the target for the proportion of staff from ethnic minorities should become 19% in line with the ethnic representation in the area of Manchester City Council. The Board's figure was currently 21%.

NG

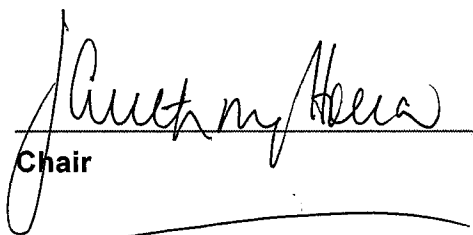
The Board noted the report.

08/40

The Board then went into closed session.

08/43

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 21 May 2008 in Manchester from 11.00 – 14.00.


Chair