

At a meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on FRIDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2011 at 1.00 p.m.

Present:-

Mr. G.N. Cook in the Chair

Councillors Forbes, Shattock, Tate and Wakefield together with Mr. J.P. Paterson and Councillor Wilkinson (Hetton Town Council).

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Charlton, Councillor Hepple (Hetton Town Council) and Mr. Stewart.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee

The minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 27th May, 2011 (copy circulated) were submitted.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

Council Publicity – Guidance Note

The Executive Director of Commercial and Corporate Services submitted a report (copy circulated), advising that a revised Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity had been issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government and in light of this revision, the Council's Guidance Note had been reviewed to ensure it was consistent with the new Code.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Council's Monitoring Officer, Ms. Elaine Waugh briefed the Committee on the report advising that the new Code was grouped into seven principles that Local Authorities should follow as detailed at paragraph 4 of the report.

Ms. Waugh advised that a draft amended Guidance Note on Council Publicity had been prepared for the Committee's consideration and was shown on the appendix to the report.

In response to Members' questions, Ms. Waugh advised that the purpose of the Guidance Note was to provide a framework for the use of Council Publicity which enables the Council to explain what it does and why and thus increasing public awareness of the services the Council provides and improving local accountability.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman regarding the bullet point that stated "Publicity will not include material likely to be perceived by readers as constituting a political statement, or being a commentary on contentious areas of public policy", Ms. Waugh advised that if publicity material was perceived by readers as such then ultimately it would be a Judge who would decide upon the matter. However, within the Council there were processes in place which involved working with Corporate Communications to ensure this did not occur.

Mr. Paterson enquired how cost effectiveness of any publicity could be determined.

Ms. Waugh advised that the Code on Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity recognised that cost effectiveness was something that is difficult to quantify or justify. For example in the case of publicising a free amenity, consideration would need to be given to the benefit of providing the information to the public.

Mr. Paterson referred to the publicity banners hanging from the lampposts at the Seafront which provided general publicity on the City's attractions and amenities. Mr. Paterson stated that the banners must have cost a fair amount when they were first purchased and added to this was the cost of putting them up and periodically changing them. Mr. Paterson enquired how this could be assessed as being cost effective and was it something the Committee should check. Mr. Paterson queried whether at a time when money was tight whether general advertising was appropriate.

The Chairman commented that whether the banners were cost effective was something that could be challenged.

Councillor Tate stated that he disagreed totally with what Mr. Paterson was saying with regards to the banners in that the Council was trying to advertise the City's attractions particularly to people visiting the City, for example Away Supporters going to football matches at the Stadium of Light. He added that the banners were not changed very often in any case.

Councillor Wakefield advised that banners had recently been placed at a roundabout in Herrington which had been the scene of an accident.

Councillor Shattock commented that there were obvious differences of opinion with regards to the publicity banners. However those at the Seafront were now shabby and the question for her was whether it would be cost effective to replace them or to take them down altogether.

Full discussion having taken place it was:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the Guidance Note on Council Publicity be noted and endorsed by the Committee;
- (ii) copies of the Guidance Note be sent to all Members, Chief Officers and Heads of Service;
- (iii) the Council be recommended to formally adopt the Guidance Note on Council Publicity and agree that it be included in the Council's Constitution in place of the previous version; and
- (iv) the appropriate Officer be invited to brief Members with regards to the publicity banners located at various points in the City.

The Chairman having thanked Members for their attendance, closed the meeting.

(Signed) G.N. COOK,
Chairman.