

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held on
12th April 2006 commencing at 7 p.m.

Present: Mr. Riddell (Chairman)
Cllr. Mrs. Dunckley (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Loney, Mrs. Parkin and Ryan.

Independent Members: Mr. P. Hobbs and Mr. A. Smith.

Town/Parish Representative: Mr. J.F. London and Mr. D. Taylor.

Cllr. Mrs. Morris was also present.

740. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed new Members to the meeting and invited all present to introduce themselves.

The Chairman then referred to the absence through illness of the Council's Monitoring Officer, Christine Nuttall. He asked that she be sent the Committee's best wishes for a speedy recovery and he thanked Officers for the work they were undertaking in her absence.

741. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21st December 2005 be agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

742. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in respect of any item discussed or voted on during the meeting.

743. STANDARDS OF CONDUCT IN ENGLISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT: THE FUTURE

The Committee considered a report setting out details of the Government's views on the future of the conduct regime for local government in England.

Members noted that the government envisaged that the great majority of complaints against Members would be investigated locally by Monitoring Officers and determined by Standards Committees. It was recognised that this would increase the workload of both the Monitoring Officer and the Standards Committee. Only the most serious cases would be investigated by the Standards Board.

The government had identified the need to amend the arrangements for declaring interests and speaking at local authority meetings and the Chief Executive felt that this was a matter which should be dealt with urgently. He pointed out that, although the government had recognised that local authorities would have to provide proper support for the increased rôle

of Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees, no mention had been made of any additional funding being forthcoming.

The Corporate Resources Director said that Officers had already tried unsuccessfully to secure assistance from the Monitoring Officers of other local authorities in dealing with investigations which had been referred to the District Council by the Standards Board.

Resolved: That the conduct regime for local government be kept under review to determine whether comments should be made to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister at a future date.

744. FIFTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

Members were informed that the Fifth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees was to take place on 16th and 17th October 2006 at Birmingham. The Corporate Resources Director advised that funding was available to allow two Members and one Officer to attend the conference.

Resolved: That Cllr. Mrs. Parkin, Mr. A. Smith and an Officer be authorised to attend the Fifth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees.

745. NEW COMPLAINTS RECEIVED FROM THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND

The Deputy Monitoring Officer reported that two complaints had recently been referred from the Standards Board for local determination and she understood that three further complaints would follow shortly. She anticipated that she would be arranging a determination hearing in approximately two months' time and she was asked to prepare an appropriate procedure for investigating such complaints.

The Vice-Chairman said that a Member of the Council had asked her to raise the matter of advice given to Members of Electoral Arrangements Committee regarding "dual-hatted Members". The Deputy Monitoring Officer said that all Members of that Committee had had access to legal advice and that she had circulated information relating to predetermination, bias and "dual-hatted Members". She and the Monitoring Officer had also given various Members a considerable amount of advice but it remained the responsibility of individual Members to declare any interests.

The Committee discussed the question as to when to notify Members that a complaint had been made against them. Cllr. Loney referred to the dilemma as to whether to inform Members that they were under investigation. The Deputy Monitoring Officer explained the current practice and said that the matter would be addressed in the procedures to be used for dealing with investigations when complaints were made directly to the Monitoring Officer.

Offices were asked to circulate copies of the existing procedures for local determination hearings.

Resolved: That the Deputy Monitoring Officer be authorised to use and amend if necessary the procedure for investigating complaints referred from the Standards Board for local determination.

746. DVD – STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND “GOING LOCAL – INVESTIGATIONS AND HEARINGS” (SEE AGENDA ITEM 3)

The Committee viewed a DVD on the subject of handling local investigations and hearings. Members felt that the DVD was extremely useful and interesting and they went on to discuss some of the issues raised. The Chairman said that there appeared to be a feeling that perhaps hearing panels should comprise a majority of independent Members, and Officers were asked to circulate a copy of the existing procedure for investigations and hearings.`

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.45 P.M.

Chairman

