

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held on  
26 January 2012 at 7pm

Present: Mr A. Riddell (Chairman), Mr A. Smith (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Mrs. Bracken, Dickins, Eyre, Mrs. Morris, Mrs Purves and Underwood.

Independent Members: Mr. Henderson

Town/Parish Representatives: Cllrs. Austin, Mrs Dickinson, Parry and Taylor.

Apologies for absence were received from: Mr R. House and Mr K. Newman

Councillor Mrs. Sargeant was also present.

The Chairman noted that this could be the last meeting of the Committee before a new standards regime was introduced and thanked all past and present Members for their contribution. The Chairman also paid tribute to Councillor Colin Dibsdall and the contribution he had made to the Standards process in Sevenoaks.

### 13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were recorded.

### 14. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Referring to page 5 of the minutes, Councillor Bracken questioned who in the SDC leadership had made it clear to the Chairman that they wanted to keep Independent Members involved in the standards process. The Chairman responded that he had been reporting on an informal conversation with the Leader of the Council, and agreed that this would be reflected in the minutes.

Resolved: That:

- (1) the Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 2 August 2011 be agreed subject to the amendments outlined above;
- (2) the Assessment Sub-Committees held on 3 August 2011 and 3 November 2011 be agreed;
- (3) and the Review Sub-Committee held on 3 October 2011 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 15. MONITORING OFFICER'S ANNUAL REPORT (Report No. 3)

The Chairman explained that for the past two years the Monitoring Officer's Annual

## Standards Committee – 26 January 2012

Report had also been considered by the Performance and Governance Committee. This year the report would be considered by the Standards Committee and would then be presented to Full Council on 21 February 2012 for endorsement.

The Monitoring Officer highlighted that the number of complaints had reduced from 20 in 2010 to 7 in 2011 and the Ombudsman had found no cases of maladministration against the Council.

The report also outlined information surrounding the new standards regime which is likely to come into effect in the latter half of 2012.

Resolved: That the Monitoring Officer's Annual Report be noted and that Full Council be recommended to note the Monitoring Officer's Annual Report on 21 February 2012.

### 16. THE NEW CODE OF CONDUCT (Report No. 4)

The Monitoring Officer explained that the new standards provisions were set out in the Localism Act 2011. The provisions applied amongst others to all District Council and Parish and Town Councils and the District Council had a statutory obligation to investigate possible breaches of the code of conduct for the Towns and Parishes within the District. Every authority would be under a duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by elected and co-opted members of the authority. Each authority was required to adopt a Code of Conduct. The powers of the Secretary of State to specify general principles and issue a model code were revoked, along with the current 10 General Principles of Conduct and the Model Code. The Act required an authority's Code to be consistent with the seven Nolan principles of conduct in public life. The Monitoring Officer was awaiting regulations to be announced by the Secretary of State giving a definition for disclosable pecuniary interests and other interests which would be disclosable under the new regime in the Members' Register of Interests. It was also clear that the District Council would be required to maintain a register of interests for Town and Parish Councils and the Monitoring Officer suggested that this could be done simply by providing a link to the Town and Parish websites.

A Parish Representative requested that all the available model codes of conduct be circulated to the Committee to allow Members to make an informed decision.

The Committee noted that Kent County Council had suggested drafting a code which it hoped would be adopted by the Parishes within Kent. As there was no prescribed Code of Conduct to be adopted there was a possibility that the District would have to work with 31 different codes of conduct. However, officers were hoping this scenario could be avoided.

Resolved: That the report be noted and that model codes of conduct be circulated to Members of the Committee.

### 17. WORKING TOWARDS ESTABLISHING THE NEW STANDARDS REGIME UNDER THE LOCALISM ACT (Report No. 5)

The Chairman noted that at its last meeting, the Standards Committee had resolved

## Standards Committee – 26 January 2012

to establish a Task and Finish Group to help develop the new Standards Regime. However, it was appreciated that it would be for the local authority to determine its internal processes. The Monitoring Officer explained that any recommendations developed by the Task Group would then go to the Modern Local Government Group to review and then to Full Council for a decision

Members agreed that it would be helpful to have a discussion surrounding the processes that could be put in place to deal with matters relating to conduct. Town and Parish Councils were the main customer base for SDC's Standards Regime and the Committee acknowledged that it was essential that Town and Parish Council's bought into any processes that were developed. However, the Committee also recognised that there were finite resources and any processes that were developed needed to be consistent with current SDC budget constraints.

Following discussions it was agreed that a Task Group with the following membership would be established:

2 District Representatives

2 Parish/Town Council Representatives

1 Independent Member

A nominee from each political group within SDC (nominated by the political leaders).

The Committee agreed that consultation with all the Town and Parish Council's would need to be undertaken as part of the process. It was important to review initial processes before the end of the municipal year before developing the detailed content of the code of conduct.

Resolved: That the report be noted and that a Task Group be established with the following Membership:

2 District Representatives

2 Parish/Town Council Representatives

1 Independent Member

A nominee from each political group within SDC (nominated by the political leaders).

As this could be the last meeting of the Standards Committee, Members of the Committee recorded a vote of thanks to the Chairman and the Monitoring Officer for the support they had provided to the Committee.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.57 p.m.

Chairman