

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held on  
19<sup>th</sup> February 2003 commencing at 7.07 p.m.

Present: Mr. Riddell (Chairman)  
Cllr. Whitehouse (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Mrs. Blight and Bovington.

Independent Member: Mr. Bootle

Town/Parish Representative: Mr. Loney

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Mrs. Course, Spence and Watson and Mr. Mason (Town/Parish representative).

602. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS

Resolved: That the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2002 and 7<sup>th</sup> May 2002 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

603. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

604. APPLICATION FOR THE DISPENSATION IN RESPECT OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEW ASH GREEN VILLAGE ASSOCIATION LTD.

The Corporate Legal Adviser informed the Committee that, under the Local Government Act 1972, the Chief Executive of the District Council through correspondence, had granted this type of dispensation. However, under the Local Government Act 2000 it had become the responsibility of the Standards Committee.

The request for dispensation stated that if the number of parish council members who were also contributors to the New Ash Green Village Association were excluded from considering financial and property matters affecting the Association, it would make the proper administration of the Parish Council very difficult. The request also set out the reasons for requiring the dispensation.

Resolved: (a) That, having regard to the matters raised in the requests and all other circumstances of the case, the dispensation under the Relevant Authorities (Standards Committee)(Dispensations) Regulations 2002 be granted to the under-mentioned Ash-cum-Ridley Parish Councillors:

Cllr. P. Martin  
Cllr. W. Farmer  
Cllr. M. Brown  
Cllr. Mrs C. Clark  
Cllr. Mrs A. Jahed

Cllr. Mrs V. Wright  
Cllr. J. Evans  
Cllr. Mrs R. Brammer  
Cllr. Mrs J. Clucas  
Cllr. P. Masson

The dispensation allows the Councillors to participate in the discussion and to vote on any question with respect to grants to the New Ash Green Village Association Limited (the Association) and land in which the Association has an interest; and

(b) The dispensation is granted for a period of four years from the date hereof.

605. FUTURE ROLE OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE AND POSSIBLE CHANGES IN THE CODE

The Chairman advised the Committee that the report brought Members' attention to a number of issues that had been brought to his attention when he and the Vice-Chairman attended the road show organised by the Standards Board for England. He stated that he was not suggesting that the Committee took on any of the extra roles mentioned by the Board. He also drew Members' attention to the letter received from Cllr. Watson whose comments had centred on the need to minimise the work and the financial costs that might be incurred by the Committee and the District Council should any of the roles of the Standards Board be undertaken.

The Vice-Chairman welcomed the suggestion of having a formal procedure at any potential hearings held by the Committee but felt there would need to be careful consideration given to the constraints set out in the Chairman's report. He also felt that training should be undertaken by Members of the Standards Committee on the Councillors Code of Conduct and how to conduct hearings and investigations into complaints. His third point was on the possibility of the informal solving of complaints. He felt that the Board could solve a large majority of complaints against Councillors through informal discussion between involved parties, so negating the necessity for formal investigation by the Standards Board. In conclusion, he drew attention to the existence of guidance for Magistrates published by the Lord Chief Justice which might be of interest to the Committee.

After some discussion it was agreed that the Standards Committee would be well advised to keep a close eye on any developments over the next year or so with regard to the processing of complaints, before making a decision on the way forward for the Committee.

Officers were also asked to investigate any existing regulations or guidance on appropriate issues and if necessary, report back to the Committee on any findings.

It was also agreed that the new intake of Councillors after the May 2003 elections would benefit from training on the Councillors Code of Conduct.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

606. SUMMARY OF COMPLAINTS TO THE STANDARDS BOARD OF ENGLAND

The Committee considered a summary of complaints made to the Standards Board of England to date.

Comments were made on the fact that the Board did not appear to notify Councillors who were the subject of a complaint. It was considered that, although it had not been made clear, the Board might not inform Councillors only the relevant local authority, or did not inform Councillors until after preliminary investigations of the complaint were completed.

In future it was requested that a flavour of the complaints listed in the report, be included.

The Committee noted that since the Board had set up the system whereby it received all complaints against Councillors, it had been overwhelmed with work.

The Corporate Legal Adviser undertook to submit a report on personal and prejudicial interests to the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.43 P.M.

Chairman

