

## **Standards Committee – 11 December 2008**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **11 December 2008** when there were present:-

Chairman: Mr D J Cottis (Independent Member)  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr P A Capon

Cllr C I Black

### **INDEPENDENT MEMBERS**

Mr M G Drage  
Mrs L Walker

### **PARISH MEMBERS**

Cllr Mrs D Constable  
Cllr Mrs L A Vingoe

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs D Merrick and M J Steptoe and Mr S Shadbolt.

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

J Honey	-	Corporate Director (Internal Services)
S Fowler	-	Head of Information and Customer Services
M Power	-	Committee Administrator

### **361 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **362 BUSINESS FROM LAST MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE 2 OCTOBER 2008**

The Committee received clarification from the Corporate Director (Internal Services) on specific wording identified at the meeting on 2 October 2008 in respect of Procedure Rules for Local Investigation and Determination of Complaints concerning the Members' Code of Conduct (Minute 279).

The Corporate Director (Internal Services) explained that the Monitoring Officer has a statutory responsibility to carry out an investigation once it has been decided by the Standards Committee that there is a case to answer. In the interest of clarity, it was agreed to adopt the following definition: 'Investigator means the Monitoring Officer or person appointed by him to carry out an investigation under these procedure rules'.

### **363 FEEDBACK FROM THE SEVENTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES CONFERENCE 13-14 OCTOBER 2008**

The Chairman gave a verbal report on the recent Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees. As well as the Chairman, three other Members of the Standards Committee had attended the conference: Cllrs Jeremy Thomass and David Merrick and Mrs Linda Walker (Independent Member). In addition to the plenary sessions, Members were able to participate in a variety of breakout sessions and fringe events covering a range of topics, which had provided much useful information. The emphasis of this Assembly was the new role of the Standards Board in supporting local authorities and, once again, those attending agreed it was an interesting and worthwhile event. As a new Member of the Standards Committee, Mrs Walker had found the conference particularly useful and had returned with a number of questions. In response to these, the Corporate Director (Internal Services) advised the following:-

- The complaint form in respect of breaches of the code had been adapted from the model supplied by the Standards Board for England.
- It was the Council's policy that anonymous complaints would not be accepted.
- The term 'alternative action' referred to remedies such as mediation, conciliation, apology etc, which were available as an alternative to hearings. Once the case was referred to the Monitoring Officer, alternative remedies could be considered.
- A quarterly monitoring report was sent electronically from the Monitoring Officer to the Standards Board. This detailed how many assessments had been made and what the outcome of the hearings had been.
- Information regarding a diversity study and an impact statement would be provided to Members at the next meeting. The Council's Annual Governance statement included the work of the Standards Committee.

### **364 CODES OF CONDUCT FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY MEMBERS AND EMPLOYEES – A CONSULTATION**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Internal Services) on a Government consultation seeking views on 21 specific issues relating to amendments to the Code of Conduct for Members and the introduction of a Code of Conduct for Employees.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- In Paragraph 8(1)(a)(vii) of the Code, it was agreed that the sum of £25 should be raised to £100 as the level at which Members have to declare and register significant gifts and hospitality.
- Due to concern regarding public perception of possible undue influence applied by Members if they were obliged to disclose in correspondence with the Council that they were Councillors, it was agreed that the

suggested wording in Paragraph 1(4) be amended to delete the following 'and by requiring Members to disclose that they are Members in any correspondence with the authority, even if that correspondence is in a private capacity'. It was also agreed that the definition of 'meetings' should be extended to include planning site meetings to enable members of the public to see which Members and Council officers had attended the site visit.

- In respect of Q22, owing to the wide variation in the size of the District's parish and town councils, it was agreed to recommend adoption of the Standards Board's wording that the Employees' Code should be discretionary rather than mandatory for parish/town councils.

### **Resolved**

That the consultation be responded to on the basis set out at Appendix 1 subject to the following amendment:-

That the wording in Paragraph 1(4) be amended to delete the following 'and by requiring Members to disclose that they are Members in any correspondence with the authority, even if that correspondence is in a private capacity' and that the definition of 'meetings' should be extended to include planning site meetings.

### **365 MANDATORY TRAINING**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Information and Customer Services considering recommendations for the implementation of mandatory training requirements.

It was noted that compulsory training requirements would apply for each municipal year. The Committee felt that:-

- It would be appropriate for the first Standards Committee in each municipal year to be held in June to facilitate consideration of any requests for dispensation.
- Sufficient notice would need to be given of the dates of compulsory training sessions.
- Appropriate opportunities for mandatory training must be available to Members.

It was confirmed that planning training would consist of varied planning-related topics during the course of the year.

The possibility of including mandatory training for all quasi-judicial committees might be considered in future.

It is proposed that the Committee **RECOMMENDS** to Council:-

- (1) That the detailed application of the arrangements for mandatory training for Members of the Development Control and Licensing Committees be as set out in paragraphs 3.3-3.10 of the officer report.
- (2) That the timetable of meetings includes provision for the first Standards Committee meeting in each Municipal Year be held in June. (HICS)

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....

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