



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

YOU ARE REQUESTED TO ATTEND A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE TO BE HELD IN THE PRINCIPAL COMMITTEE ROOM, THE DEANE HOUSE, BELVEDERE ROAD, TAUNTON ON TUESDAY 13TH JUNE 2006 AT 14:15.

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the meeting of 14 March 2006 (attached)
3. Declaration of Interests
To receive declarations of personal or prejudicial interests, in accordance with the Code of Conduct
4. Chairman to report on his meeting with Group Leaders on 11 April 2006
5. Councillors Training - 27 June 2006
To consider details of training presentation
6. Parish Councils - David Greig, Parish Liaison Officer to report any issues arising
7. South West Independent Members Group Meeting
Minutes of meeting held at Thornbury on 24 March 2006 (attached)
8. Report of Monitoring Officer on current ethics and probity issues within Taunton Deane
9. Bridging the Gap - Fifth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees 16 - 17 October 2006, ICC, Birmingham

G P DYKE
Member Services Manager
05 June 2006



Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussion. Lift access to the main committee room on the first floor of the building is available from the main ground floor entrance. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are also available. There is a time set aside at the beginning of the meeting to allow the public to ask questions



An induction loop operates to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter. If you require any further information, please contact Greg Dyke on:



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Website: www.tauntondeane.gov.uk (Council, Executive, Review Board & Review Panel Agenda, Reports and Minutes are available on the Website)

Standards Committee – 14 March 2006

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in the Principal Committee Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on Tuesday, 14 March 2006 at 2.15 pm

Present: Mr D Baker (Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Croad, Slattery and Mrs Whitmarsh
Mr J Dewdney, Mrs A Elder and Mr W L Rogers

Officers: Mr G P Dyke (Member Services Manager), Mr D Greig (Parish Liaison Officer and Mrs D Durham (Review Support Officer)

15. Apologies

Mrs P M A Hawks, Mr M Stanbury and Councillor E Warren

16. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 16 February 2006 were taken as read and were signed.

17. Standards Committee – Future Developments

Further to Minute 3 (16 February 2006) a presentation was made by Greg Dyke, Member Services Manager, on those issues that had been identified by the Committee as being matters that it needed to be more aware of in order to form an “Information Programme”.

The following items were covered during the presentation:-

- ! The Code of Conduct;
- ! Interests and hospitality;
- ! The Constitution;
- ! Protocols and Codes of Good Practice including the Planning Code of Good Practice, IT Policy, Acceptable Use Policy for individual websites and Complaints’ Procedure;
- ! Legal requirements of the Standards Committee;
- ! TDBC Standards Committee Terms of Reference;
- ! Role and function of Standards Committee as set out in the Constitution.

Following the presentation which provided much of the background information that the Committee had requested, the Council’s Hospitality Registers and the Register of Interests were made available for inspection. It was agreed that as part of its role to proactively monitor Ethics and Probity, these Registers would be made available for inspection on a regular basis by the Committee.

RESOLVED that the information contained in the presentation be noted.

18. Parish Council Involvement

David Greig, Parish Liaison Officer, explained his role in relation to Ethics and Probity and Parish Councils. It was noted that he provided guidance, talked to parishes individually to remind them of the requirements of the Code of Conduct and attended many parish council meetings. As a result there was very rarely any cause for concern. The monitoring role was carried out very much by the presence of the Parish Liaison Officer at meetings of Parish Councils. New Councillors were offered training, together with relevant documents and publications.

The Annual Meeting of Parish Councils had also included an item regarding Ethics and Probity and the Chairman of the Standards Committee had addressed the last meeting.

The Committee gave detailed consideration to what areas it felt improvements could be made as far as Parish Councils were concerned. It was necessary to build monitoring into regular meetings and that the Committee should do more to fulfil its statutory role in relation to Parish Councils. It was noted that Parish Council elections would take place in 2007 when many new Parish Councillors would be elected and there would be a need for formal training sessions at that time.

In an effort to continue to be proactive, the Committee felt that it might be useful for Members to visit and observe meetings of Parish Councils from time to time. It was also suggested that a small Road Show presented by the independent members of the Committee visit Parish Councils to explain the work of the Standards Committee during an Information Evening.

Consideration was given to the services that could be provided by the Somerset Association of Local Councils who already had a programme of training in place. After hearing what it could provide, it was felt that SALC would not be able to offer any more than Taunton Deane could provide through the Parish Liaison Officer.

RESOLVED that

- (1) The Parish Liaison Officer continue to make Parish Councils aware of their responsibilities with regard to Ethics and Probity
- (2) A further report be submitted by the Parish Liaison Officer emphasising areas which the Standards Committee could concentrate on in an effort to be helpful to Parish Councils.
- (3) Members of the Committee make themselves available to attend Parish Council Meetings and observe their proceedings.
- (4) Training in Ethics and Probity be provided for new Parish Councillors as part of their induction.

- (5) Periodic reports be submitted by the Parish Liaison Officer to highlight issues that had arisen.
- (6) Members of Parish Councils be made aware that they would be welcomed to attend any meetings of this Standards Committee.

19. Report of Acting Monitoring Officer on Ethics and Probity Issues

The Acting Monitoring Officer provided the regular briefing on matters that had come to his attention since the last meeting. It was apparent that Members continued to seek advice on all issues relating to Ethics and Probity. Since the last meeting advice had been sought on the need to declare interests and “fettering of discretion”. Further investigations would also continue to be undertaken regarding the implications of Councillors’ web logging.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

20. Resignation of Committee Member

Reported that an independent member, Mr Brian Gould, had resigned from the Committee. This meant that there were now two vacancies for independent members of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the resignation of Mr Gould be noted and that steps be taken to fill the two vacancies for independent members.

(The meeting ended at 4.30 pm.)



SOUTH WEST INDEPENDENT MEMBERS GROUP
Friday 24th March 2006

NAME	AUTHORITY
Pauline Dixon	South Gloucestershire Council
Cyril Ley	Mid Devon CC
Peter Kimber	Tewkesbury BC
Sara Freckleton	Tewkesbury BC
Anne Mayes	Devon & Cornwall Police Authority
Mike Watson	Dartmoor National park Authority
Brian Kirby	Exeter City Council
Alun Morgan	BANES
Sylvia Fox	Poole BC
Susan Mew	Exmoor National Park
Simon Cannell	South Gloucestershire Council
Lillian Molnar	Avon & Somerset Police Authority
Anne Vernon	Gloucestershire CC
Roger Mitchell	Taunton DC
P Goodall	Poole BC
Robin Withers	Sedgemoor DC
Dr JA Rees	East Devon DC
Andrew Ades	North Cornwall DC
Mike Hillman	Mendip DC
Maurice Williams	Mid Devon CC
Clive Dibben	Dorset CC
Sir Vernon Seccombe	Caradon DC
Jenny Arnold	North Devon DC
Andrew May	West Dorset DC
Susan Davies	West Dorset DC
Stuart Caundle	North Dorset DC
Ian McNeil	North Dorset DC
Melanie Gibbs	Gloucestershire CC

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Pauline Dixon, Chair of South Gloucestershire Council's Standards Committee welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from West Devon BC, East Dorset DC, Penwith DC, Cotswold DC.

3. EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure as set out under the notes.

4. CURRENT ISSUES FOR STANDARDS COMMITTEES

Members were asked to identify issues of concern to feed into future meetings. Members highlighted the following:

Parish Councils

- Links with Parish Councils – improving understanding and changing behaviours
- Supporting and helping Parish Councils
- Non-attendance of Parish Council's at training events

Membership of Standards Committee

- Selection and quality of Standards Committee members
- How to ensure that the Standards Committee is taken seriously
- Member/Officer relations – guidance needed
- Balance Independent Members/Councillors
- Calibre and quality of Councillors selected to sit on the Standards Committee
- Correct number of Independent Members on the Standards Committee
- Legal status of Independent Chairs of Standards Committees within the council
- Shelf life of a chair
- Professional Association of Independent Members required?

Resources

- Funding for Standards Committees
- Costs and resources – pooling of resources in area
- Costs incurred for those complained about
- Are the costs worth the penalties imposable – should the penalties available be increased?

Others

- Role of Standards Committees in CPA
- Ethical Governance Toolkit – any experiences to share
- Guidance on cases
- Gulf between Central Government and Local Government
- Reciprocal arrangements for hearing local determinations with neighbouring authorities
- Is the South West group becoming too large?
- Local arbitration services could prevent a number of cases

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

Anne Reyhill, Senior Policy Advisor to the Standards Board gave a presentation to members making the following points:

- The Standards Board would continue the shift away from case investigations, with more cases dealt with locally
- The Standards Board would concentrate on investigating cases of national significance.
- The Standards Board would become more involved in providing training and training materials.

A number of issues were raised for consideration by the Standards Board:

- Local filtering – how will it work? Who will do it?
- What is being decided? Not everything requires investigation – option to mediate etc
- Who has the right to appeal?
- Combining Standards Committees – what would be their function/role, how would they be set up and resourced?
- Independent Members – skills, requirements, panel's role in selection, job descriptions needed?
- Implications of work loads for Monitoring Officers
- Resources – cost of training, embedding the code & hearings
- Deputy Monitoring Officers do not currently have the same statutory protection as Monitoring Officers
- Should the Standards Committee have increased capacity for sanctions
- What are the call in mechanisms for the Standards Board

New Code of Conduct:

- The Code should be made simpler, more enabling and with increased ownership.
- More clarity should be provided on issues of confidentiality
- Rules on declarations of interest should be made simpler
- Removal of duty to report breaches of the code
- Specific provision for bullying

Interests:

- Should be simplified, reduced number of Personal Interests.
- Introduction of a public service interest – would provide more scope for Councillors to speak on issues if on other committees or lobby groups. This is of particular benefit for single interest Councillors

Issues arising from presentation:

- The system will fail without sufficient resources
- A loss of Independent Members could be seen due to increased workloads, responsibilities and required skill base
- The sharing of resources such as Monitoring Officers is not practical due to differing workloads
- A more consolidated approach to appointing Independent Members is needed

- Guidance is needed on the size and composition of Standards Committees
- Guidance is needed on best practice from the Standards Board and Local government Association
- More practical help is required – model specifications, templates, case studies
- Work of Standards Committee when there are no hearings – especially in County Councils as they are not parished.
- Remuneration of Independent Members – open to Local Authorities to decide
- Issues of recruitment when no remuneration is offered.

6. RESPONSE TO THE OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER BY SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE'S STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Chair of South Gloucestershire 's Standards Committee asked that Members consider the response with a view to issuing their own response.

7. A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE OF AN ADJUDICATION PANEL AND LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

South Gloucestershire's Monitoring Officer gave a presentation on Adjudication Panels, a general discussion followed.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be hosted by Poole Borough Council. Details would be circulated once available.