

Standards Committee – 13 September 2011

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on Tuesday 13 September 2011 at 2.30 p.m.

Present: Mrs A Elder (Chairman)
Mr A Cottrell (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Brooks and Gaines
Mr H Davenport, Mr D Macey, Mr M Marshall and Mr L Rogers

Officers: Mrs T Meers (Monitoring Officer) and Mrs G Croucher (Democratic Services Officer)

Also Present: Councillor Horsley and Mr A Cox

84. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed Mr A Cox to the meeting as an observer.

85. Apologies

Mr T Bowditch and Mr B Wilson.

86. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 12 July 2011 were taken as read and were signed.

87. Declaration of Interests

The Chairman, Anne Elder, declared personal interests as a Public Governor of the Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust and as a Member of the House Management Committee of one of the premises operated by the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution. Councillor Mrs Allgrove declared a personal interest as a Member of the Somerset Association of Local Councils. Councillor Brooks declared a personal interest as a Member of Somerset County Council.

88. Business requiring to be dealt with as a matter of urgency

The Chairman reported that she had agreed that the item covered by Minute No 89 below should be dealt with as an urgent matter.

89. Protocol for the disclosure of Confidential Information

The Monitoring Officer, Mrs Meers, reported that a number of breaches of the Code of Conduct in respect of disclosing confidential information had been reported to the Standards Committee in recent years and a recent leak to the press was currently being investigated.

The Committee considered a draft protocol and it was proposed this should be adopted to assist Members in understanding the issues surrounding confidential information and the circumstances in which any such information could be released.

Resolved that:-

1. The Protocol for Disclosure of Confidential Information be adopted; and
2. The Protocol be sent to all Parish Councillors as guidance.

90. The future of the Standards Regime

Mrs Meers reported on the progress of the Government's Localism Bill the contents of which, if brought into law, could have a considerable impact on the Standards regime currently operated by Councils in England.

The Bill was currently passing through the House of Lords and it was expected that Councils would retain a Code of Conduct and Standards Committees. It was expected that Members would need to register pecuniary interests rather than personal or prejudicial as at present.

However, there was currently no further information on the range of sanctions that would be available to Councils and Mrs Meers hoped to bring a further, more detailed, update to the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved that the update provided on the Localism Bill be noted.

91. Draft Annual Report of the Standards Committee

Submitted a draft Annual Report of the Committee for consideration. It was agreed that the draft Annual Report be submitted to the Council's Corporate Governance Committee.

Resolved that the report be noted.

92. Audit Training and other Training Events

The Chairman reported that she had recently attended a number of training events including the Audit Training.

She found the training sessions to be valuable and recommended that all Councillors should attend.

Members considered that Parish Councillors should also be invited to attend any future training sessions.

93. Attendance at Taunton Deane Committee Meetings

The Chairman reported that since the last meeting in July 2011, she had attended all meetings of the Planning Committee and Full Council as the independent representative from the Standards Committee.

It was considered that this was very useful in raising the profile of the Standards Committee.

94. News from the Parishes

The Chairman reported that the Parish Liaison Officer, Mr David Greig, was currently unwell. The Committee sent Mr Greig their best wishes for a speedy recovery.

It was agreed to reinstate attendance by the independent Members of the Standards Committee at future Parish Council meetings. A letter would be sent to the Chairmen of the Parish Councils asking for confirmation of meeting dates

95. Date of next meeting

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 7 December 2011 at 2.30 pm in the John Meikle Room at The Deane House.

96. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 2 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

97. Update on complaints made against Councillors

Mrs Meers reported that a new complaint had recently been received against a Taunton Deane Councillor. An investigator had been appointed to look into the complaint.

Resolved that the report be noted.

(The meeting ended at 3.50 p.m.)