



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.