

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.)