

Draft minutes subject to approval at the next meeting of the Standards Committee

Standards Committee – 15 August 2006

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in Committee Room 1, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on Tuesday 15 August 2006 at 2.15 p.m.

Present: Mr D Baker (Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Allgrove, and Croad
Mrs A Elder, Mr J Dewdney, Mr D Gollins, Mrs P Hawks, Mr H Inder
and Mr W L Rogers

Officers: Mr JJ Thornberry (Monitoring Officer) and Mr G P Dyke (Member Services Manager)

Also present: Councillor Stuart – Thorn

32. Apologies

Councillors Slattery and Mrs Whitmarsh
Mr M Stanbury and Councillor E Warren

33. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 13 June 2006 were taken as read and were signed.

34. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Mrs J Allgrove declared a personal interest in any items relating to parish council matters as she was Vice Chair of the Somerset Association of Local Councils.

35. Appointment of New Members

Mr David Gollins and Mr Harold Inder were welcomed to the meeting. They had both been appointed as independent members of the Committee, subject to formal approval by the Council.

36. Councillor Training

The Committee discussed the Member Training session that had taken place on 27 June 2006. It was agreed that this had been successful in reminding councillors of the current responsibilities with regard to ethics and probity and in drawing attention to likely changes in the near future. It was noted that only 5 out of the Council's 54 members had not been able to attend any of the training promoted by the Committee within the last 3 years.

It was also reported that it was intended to hold a training session for representatives of Parish Councils at this years Annual Meeting of Parish Councils. In answer to a question it was explained that the Parish Liaison Officer offered one to one training to members and clerks of parish councils who were elected or appointed mid term

RESOLVED that

- (a) a further training opportunity on ethics and probity be offered to those councillors who had been unable to attend any of the previous sessions;
- (b) the Parish Liaison Officer provide the Committee with details of the training event he intended to present at the Annual Meeting of Parish Councils

37. Local Investigation – Trull Parish Council

The Committee discussed the lessons that had been learnt following the first local investigation which had recently taken place.

As far as the process was concerned the bureaucracy of the procedure had certainly involved officers in a significant amount of time, particularly in view of the minor nature of this particular breach. It had, however, served as good training for any future such investigations.

The amount of time taken to complete the investigation and bring the matter before a Hearing Sub Committee had been the subject of previous discussion. This was acknowledged as an area where improvements would need to be made in future cases. The inflexibility of the investigation process and the amount of time that had to be devoted to it meant that there was no spare capacity to deal with future cases. It was anticipated, therefore, that external investigators would need to be appointed to carry out initial investigation work.

This particular case had also revealed the need for a change in the culture of ethics and standards within some parish councils. This Committee felt that it had a vital role to play in continuing to promote ethics and probity within parish councils. The Committee would, therefore, look to become more involved in this area and would wish to discuss the matter further at its next meeting.

RESOLVED that the Monitoring Officer submit a bid for additional resources in the next Budget round in anticipation of the need to appoint external investigators.

38. Standards Committee Annual Report

Reported that it would soon be time for the Committee's Annual Report to be submitted to the Council. Consideration was given to the content of the report. It was agreed that a draft report be prepared which should include, amongst other things, reference to training, the need for additional resources, latest

trends and impending national changes. It was also agreed that once the report had been submitted to the Council it be circulated to all parish councils.

RESOLVED that a draft Annual Report of the Standards Committee be submitted at the next meeting.

39 Report of the Monitoring Officer on Ethics and Probity Issues

The Monitoring Officer provided his regular briefing on matters that had come to his attention since the last meeting. The issues had included, possible breach of confidence, the media protocol, the role of councillors and land ownerships. All matters had been satisfactorily resolved.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

40. Parish Matters

Submitted a briefing note from the Parish Liaison Officer. Visits to Parish Councils continued with no problems being encountered. Routine enquiries only had been received from parishes about the Code. Training for Trull Parish Council and its Clerk had been arranged following the recent local investigation.

RESOLVED that the report be noted

41. Timetable of Future Meetings

RESOLVED that meetings of the Committee be arranged for the following dates:

14 November 2006
13 March 2007
12 June 2007
14 August 2007

(The meeting ended at 3.23pm)