

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

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

Officers: Mr J J Thornberry (Monitoring Officer), Mr G P Dyke (Democratic Services Manager), Mr D Greig (Parish Liaison Officer) and Mrs D Durham (Democratic Services Officer).

42. Appointment of Chairman

RESOLVED that David Baker be appointed Chairman of the Standards Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

43. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED that Anne Elder be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Standards Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

44. Apologies

Councillors Mrs Allgrove and Mrs Whitmarsh
Mr D Gollin, Mrs P Hawks, Mr M Stanbury and Councillor E Warren

45. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 15 August 2006 were taken as read and were signed.

46. Draft Annual Report of the Standards Committee

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

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

47. Fifth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees

The 2006 Annual Assembly of Standards Committees had been attended by the Chairman, David Baker and the Democratic Services Manager, Greg Dyke. Each provided a resume of the lectures and workshops attended. Outreach had been discussed, which involved trying to get young people interested in Local Government, with an emphasis on Ethics and Probity.

It required much work, with visits to schools and colleges, but the Committee felt it was worth pursuing.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

48. Report of the Parish Liaison Officer

David Greig, the Parish Liaison Officer had attended the Annual Meeting with Parish Councils. Parishes were reminded of the importance of the Code of Conduct and the availability of training.

Details of a recently granted dispensation were given. The dispensation was granted by the Monitoring Officer after consultation with the Chairman of the Standards Committee in accordance with agreed procedures.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

49. South West Independent Member Group meeting

Submitted a note of the latest meeting of the South West Independent Members Group which had been held in Poole on 29 September 2006. This committee had been represented by the Chairman, David Baker who submitted details of an address given by a Legal Advisor to the Standards Board. It was particularly noted that Standards Committees must remain impartial, as there had been a number of successful appeals.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

50. 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, declarations of interest, the implementation and training of the new Code of Conduct and the 'White Paper'.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

51. Attendance at meetings

Details of Members' attendance at meetings had been publicised as part of the review of Members' allowances. When the Chairman presented his report at the Resources Review Panel, Members felt that a broader view of a Councillor's work should be provided in the future, to give a more balanced view of their work.

A questionnaire that had been undertaken by Members approximately a year ago had subsequently been distributed to the Review Panel.

It was felt that all prospective candidates should be given the opportunity of attending meetings to learn about what would be expected of them.

The Chairman acknowledged that information should be balanced, otherwise the public view of the work of Councillors could become distorted. The publication of information should however, be encouraged, to reflect greater openness.

52. Statement from the Chairman

The Chairman emphasised the need for members of the Standards Committee to promote good standards themselves when attending meetings, both here and elsewhere. Members of the committee were required to act correctly at all times and any advice given on behalf of the Standards Committee should be given by the Monitoring Officer. Recent public expressions of opinions by members of the Standards Committee were likely to result in the perception of prejudice. This illustrated the care that members needed to take when speaking publically. Such perceptions were likely to affect an individuals ability to adjudicate at local hearings.

53. Future Programme of the Committee

The new Code of Conduct would shortly be available and it was agreed that it would be sent to members of the Standards Committee for comment. In view of this, and other developments that were likely to take place it was agreed that the Chairman, together with the appropriate officers would draw up a programme for the future work of the Committee.

(The meeting ended at 4.27pm)