

Standards Committee – 25 June 2007

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in Committee Room 2, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on Monday 25 June 2007 at 2.15pm.

Present: Mr D Baker (Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Allgrove and Slattery
Mrs A Elder, Mrs J Hoyle, Mr R Macey, Mr W L Rogers and
Mr M Stanbury

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

15. Apologies

Councillor Morrell
Mr J J Thornberry (Monitoring Officer)
Mr H Inder

16. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 11 April 2007 were taken as read and were signed.

17. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Mrs Allgrove declared an interest as Chairman of Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC).

18. Membership of the Committee

Reported that the current membership of the Standards Committee had been agreed by Council at its Annual meeting on 16 May 2007.

Former Councillor Croad and Councillor Mrs Whitmarsh were no longer members of the Committee. It was agreed the Committee's thanks be recorded for the contribution that they had made to its work.

The Chairman also introduced the two new Independent Members, Jenny Hoyle and Dick Macey and welcomed them to the Committee.

Nominations were currently being sought for two Parish Council representatives. Details would be reported to the Committee at its meeting on 14 August 2007.

RESOLVED that the Chairman write to the retired members of the Standards Committee.

19. Proposals for Strengthening Links and Developing Training with Parish Councils

The Local Government Act 2000 had imposed a legal duty on Standards Committees to provide training to both Borough and Parish Councillors.

Taunton Deane had 41 Parish Councils, 39 Parish Clerks and 343 Parish Councillors. It was essential that Parish Councils received training on the revised Code of Conduct. It is understood that approximately 60% of them were affiliated to SALC and some 60% of these actively participated in SALC activities. This related to about 26 of the 41 Parish Councils not participating in SALC activities. Training for Parish Councillors on legislation, committee procedures etc was normally provided by SALC whilst training on the Code of Conduct was normally provided by the Borough Council. However, it was agreed that in-house training sessions had proved to be effective in the past and that two or three should also be provided, with members of the Standards Committee being encouraged to attend each session.

Any Parish Councils that were unable to attend these sessions would be contacted by the Parish Liaison Officer who would arrange individual training. It was suggested that a member of the Standards Committee accompany him when carrying out the training. It was agreed that a positive approach had to be taken to encourage Parish Councillors attendance at these sessions.

Some members of the Standards Committee felt that, in order to have an understanding of the work of Parish Councils, they should attend some meetings with the Parish Liaison Officer. Attendance at such meetings would be arranged through either Lynn Rogers or the Parish Liaison Officer.

The Parish Liaison Officer reported that all Parish Councils had been issued with the revised Code of Conduct and Parish Clerks had been sent instructions on how to adopt the new Code.

A programme of training dates would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

20. Elections 2007

The Democratic Services Manager had previously reported on how the work of the Standards Committee would be included in the election process. The guide for prospective candidates, both Borough and Parish, included details of Ethics and Probity and the Chairman of the

Standards Committee had attended the new members Welcome Day to talk about the role of the Standards Committee. In addition, both the Democratic Services Manager and the Monitoring Officer had outlined members responsibilities during the induction training for new councillors.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

21. Councillor Training

The Democratic Services Manager gave a draft presentation on Ethics and Probity that would be included in the Councillors training session on 11 July 2007.

A number of minor alterations were suggested. It was also agreed that some guidance/protocol to accompany the revised Code might be of some assistance to reinforce the need for confidentiality and to act within established internal procedures of the local authority.

The Democratic Services Manager encouraged members of the Standards Committee to attend the training session.

RESOLVED that the Council be recommended to provide some guidance/protocol to accompany the revised Code of Conduct in respect of the disclosure of confidential information.

22. Feedback from the Standards Board for England Roadshow

A Standards Board for England Roadshow had been held on 20 June and had been attended by the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Manager.

It was hoped that The Local Authorities (Model Code of Local Government Conduct) Order 2007 would receive assent in either July or October and would be determined locally in April 2008, when information and guidelines would be issued.

It was essential that a register of complaints would need to be maintained and returns completed for the Standards Board. The Committee would welcome regular reports about complaints and the results of such complaints.

A new structure for the local filtering of complaints would also be required. Although guidance was expected from the Standards Board for England, training would also be needed for the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and consideration be given to formulating a structure for dealing with complaints locally.

23. Report of the Monitoring Officer on Ethics and Probity issues

The Democratic Services Manager provided a briefing on behalf of the Monitoring Officer.

All 56 Councillors had signed their declarations and the Monitoring Officer had been encouraged by the number of new Councillors who had sought advice on the subject of declaring interests.

The Annual Assembly of Standards Committees would be held in Birmingham on 15 and 16 October 2007. This year's Assembly would concentrate on ways of making local regulation work.

The next South West Conference for Independent Members would be hosted by Taunton Deane Standards Committee. It was scheduled to be held on 20 September 2007. Hazel Salisbury from the Standards Board for England had agreed to speak and other speakers were currently being sought.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the report be noted; and
- (ii) the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Manager attend this years Annual Assembly.

24. Dates of Future Meetings

The following meeting dates were noted:

Tuesday 14 August 2007
Tuesday 23 October 2007 (changed from 16 October 2007)
Tuesday 15 January 2008
Wednesday 16 April 2008
Tuesday 10 June 2008
Tuesday 12 August 2008
Tuesday 21 October 2008

It was agreed that the dates would be circulated to all members of the Standards Committee, along with the date of the South West Conference for Independent Members and membership of the Committee.

(The meeting ended at 4.25pm)