

## Standards Committee – 14 August 2007

**MINUTES**

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Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in Committee Room 2, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on Tuesday 14 August 2007 at 2.15pm.

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

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).

### 25. Apologies

Councillor Slattery  
Mr H Inder  
Mr D Macey

### 26. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 25 June 2007 were taken as read and were signed.

### 27. Declaration of Interests

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

### 28. Membership of the Committee – Appointment of Parish Representatives

Considered the appointment of two Parish Representatives to the Standards Committee.

The criteria for the appointment of Independent Members of the Committee specified that candidates should not currently be employed by any local authority or have been so employed within the last 5 years. The Committee felt that the same sort of criteria should be applied when considering the appointment of Parish Representatives. It should also relate to past members of the Council as well as those that had been employed.

Seven nominations had been received, all of a high standard. Many offered a vast amount of knowledge and experience.

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- (i) the criteria for the appointment of Parish representatives state that candidates should not have been a Member of Taunton Deane Borough Council for at least five years preceding their appointment;
- (ii) Mr Mike Marshall of Ruishton and Thornfalcon Parish Council and Mr David Wilson of Wiveliscombe Parish Council be appointed as Parish Representatives to the Standards Committee.

## **29. Training for Councillors**

An Ethics and Probity training session had been held on 11 July 2007 and was attended by 30 Councillors.

Before the training session, the draft presentation had been given to the Standards Committee and this had proved useful as a number of minor amendments had been suggested.

The training that had been delivered, complimented other Ethics and Probity training at the Induction Day and when Members had met with the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer.

The success of the Ethics and Probity training was illustrated by the number of enquiries that had been forthcoming from Members.. There had also been an upsurge in declarations made at meetings.

The Committee felt that the training should be repeated, possibly annually, in order to keep Members well informed. They also asked that a list of attendees be submitted at the next meeting of the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

## **30. Performance Targets/Indicators**

The Committee felt that it was important that some performance targets/indicators were in place in order that the work of the Committee could be measured.

Various performance targets were discussed and it was suggested that a sub-committee, consisting of the Chairman, Mr Stanbury, Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Manager, should meet to draft a list of indicators.

It was felt that communications needed to be improved and monitored and this would be discussed at the next meeting.

## **31. South West Conference for Independent Members of Standards Committees**

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The Democratic Services Officer had previously reported that the South West Independent Members of Standards Committees Conference would be held at The Deane House on 20 September.

Details of the timetable for the day were submitted. The new Director of Casework at the Standards Board for England, Hazel Salisbury, had agreed to speak at the conference. She would detail the sort of cases that might occur under the new Code, as well as the success of the pilot projects that were underway.

The Committee felt that guidance on the structure of Standards Committees would be useful, as well as a presentation by the Parish Liaison Officer regarding the training of Parish Councils.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

### **32. Parish Matters**

The Parish Liaison Officer had previously reported on the adoption of the new Code of Conduct by Parish Councils and confirmed that there was 100% acceptance of the Code.

The Parish Liaison Officer had submitted a schedule of Parish Council meeting dates as requested at the previous meeting.

Ethics and Probity training had been delivered by the Parish Liaison Officer at recent Parish Council meetings. Although a training session at The Deane House was discussed, it was felt that the training that was currently being provided was the most effective way of delivering training to Parish Councillors. A discussion took place on the advisability of a meeting with the Chairman and Clerk, attended by an Independent member of the Standards Committee, prior to the delivery of the training by the Parish Liaison Officer. After discussion it was agreed that this approach would not be necessary. It was felt that as well as delivering training at Parish Council meetings, members of this Committee should attend meetings from time to time to familiarise themselves with the workings of Parish Councils and to raise awareness of the ethics and probity work that the Committee was undertaking. The Chairman, Lynn Rogers and the Parish Liaison Officer would discuss a corporate brief for members attending Parish Councils which would then be circulated.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and the method of training Parish Councils and parish councillors, as outlined by the Parish Liaison Officer be agreed.

### **33. 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 the auditing of the adoption of the new Code of Conduct and recording of

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Members interests and the current status of the Local Government and Health Bill.

He reported his concern about changes to the Code of Conduct which meant that Members could now comment on planning applications and issues that they had an interest in. He was concerned that credibility needed to be maintained and in order to ensure that members of the public understood the new procedure, a protocol would be provided. Members of the public needed to aware of what was happening with the procedure being transparent.

The Monitoring Officer also drew attention to the large number of allegations made to the Standards Board for England in respect of one particular Parish Council. None of the allegations had been worthy of investigation and it was apparent from the issues involved that an inappropriate use of the Code was being made.

Members had also been previously notified of a case concerning a parish councillor. Although early indications pointed to this case being referred for local determination the SBE had now informed us that it would be dealing with this case itself.

RESOLVED that:-

(i) the Chairman, together with the Monitoring Officer and the Democratic Services Manager, draft a protocol regarding declarations of prejudicial interest at meetings of the Planning Committee for consideration by this Committee at its next meeting;

(ii) the Parish Liaison Officer, together with the Chairman visit the Parish Council referred to above in order to offer advice and guidance on the proper use of the Code of Conduct;

#### **34. Standards Committee Training Event 2008**

Noted that Somerset County Council would be holding a Standards Committee Training event for members of Standards Committees throughout the County on 31 January 2008 .

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