

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in the Principal Committee Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on Tuesday 23 October 2007 at 2.15 pm

Present: Mr D Baker (Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Allgrove and House
Mrs A Elder, Mrs J Hoyle, Mr H Inder, Mr M Marshall, Mr W L Rogers,
Mr M Stanbury and Mr D Wilson

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

35. Apologies

Councillor Slattery
Mr D Macey

36. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Mrs Allgrove declared a personal interest as Chair of the Somerset Association of Local Councils

36. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 14 August 2007 were taken as read and were signed.

37. Code of Conduct Training for Parish Council and Parish Matters

The Parish Liaison Officer submitted details of the Parish Councils that had recently received Ethics and Probity training and provided the planned dates for the remaining Parish Councils. So far approximately 21 parish councils had been visited and a total of around 150 parish councillors had received training.

All Members of the Committee had attended at least one Parish Council meeting to raise awareness of the ethics and probity work that the Committee was undertaking.

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This had proved a very worthwhile exercise and was an excellent way of ensuring as many parish councillors as possible received first hand training in standards and the Code of Conduct.

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RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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38. Guidelines for the Implementation of Filtering Committees

Reported that the role of the Standards Committee would be changing from April 2008 when local regulation of standards would be introduced. Previously all complaints and allegations in relation to the conduct of councillors went direct to the Standards Board for England. It was now proposed to change this system so that in most cases, allegations, complaints, investigations and hearings were all carried out locally. This meant that a protocol would need to be developed for the implementation of filtering committees, investigations and hearings..

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The initial filter of allegations and complaints would be dealt with by this Committee and formal records would need to be provided. Members, together with the Monitoring Officer, would also need to undergo training.

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RESOLVED that a draft protocol be submitted to the January meeting of the Committee.

39. Code of Conduct Training Course

Reported that the Chairman, together with the Monitoring Officer, Democratic Services Manager and Parish Liaison Officer had attended a Code of Conduct training course in Bridgwater on 5 October 2007. Details of the main issues raised were submitted.

As a training exercise for this Committee, members discussed a number of test cases from the training session and then drew their own conclusions as to whether a breach of the Code of Conduct had taken place.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

40. Feedback from the SW Independent Members Forum

The South West Conference for Independent Members of Standards Committees had taken place The Deane House on 20 September 2007. The new Director of Casework at the Standards Board for England, Hazel Salisbury, had given details of the sort of cases that might occur under the new Code, as well as the success of the pilot projects that were underway.

There had also been a presentation by the Parish Liaison Officer regarding the training of Parish Councils and guidance on the structure of Standards Committees.

Members felt that Forum had been very useful.

41. Performance Indicators

Reported that the Chairman, together with the Monitoring Officer and the Democratic Services Manager had drawn up a list of performance targets and indicators which would help in the measurement of the work of the Committee

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Details of the proposed targets were submitted. This was considered to be a good start to this exercise but that further depth was needed. It was agreed that further details would be submitted to the next meeting.

RESOLVED that further work be carried out on the proposed targets and indicators and the results be submitted to the next meeting..

42. Annual Assembly of Standards Committees

The Chairman, together with the Monitoring Officer, the Democratic Services Manager and Parish Liaison Officer, had recently attended the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees. They had attended a number of sessions and workshops which had proved to be mostly very interesting. It was hoped that some of the information gleaned would help with the forthcoming introduction of local regulation.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

43. Ethics and Probity

The Monitoring Officer provided his regular briefing on matters that had come to his attention since the last meeting. The issues included the raising of concerns that were covered by more than one authority.

Two allegations had been made to the Standards Board one of which was at the draft report stage.

He had received a number of queries from councillors regarding planning inquiries which had been resolved.

(The meeting ended at 4.09 p.m.)

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