

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in Committee Room 1, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on Tuesday 26 August 2008 at 2.15 pm

Present: Mrs A Elder (Chairman)
Mr M Stanbury (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor House
Mr H Inder, Mrs J Hoyle, Mr R Macey and Mr M Marshall

Officers: Mrs T Meers (Monitoring Officer), Mr R Bryant (Democratic Services Manager), Mr D Greig (Parish Liaison Officer)

Also present: Councillor Stuart-Thorn

31. Apologies

Councillors Mrs Allgrove and Slattery and Mr W L Rogers

32. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 10 June 2008 were taken as read and were signed.

33. “How to make a complaint about a Councillor” Leaflet

A further draft of the “How to make a complaint about a Councillor” Leaflet, which incorporated a number of changes requested by Members of the Standards Committee, was circulated.

Apart from a number of minor further changes, the leaflet was approved for publication and distribution. It would be available to the public in The Deane House Reception, the Community Office in Wellington, local libraries, the Citizen’s Advice Bureau and local Post Offices.

34. Update on the new Local Assessment Process

The Monitoring Officer, Tonya Meers, reported that since the new Local Assessment Process had come into effect in early May 2008, a total of two complaints had been received.

One of these complaints was currently the subject of an investigation. The other had only recently been received and would be considered by the Assessment Sub-Committee (immediately following the meeting of the Standards Committee), as to whether an investigation into this complaint should also take place.

It was agreed that in future Members of the Committee would be notified when new complaints were received. However, it was confirmed that no specific details as to the complaint would be released at this very early stage of the

process.

35. Update on the Constitution for the Standards Committee

Mrs Meers informed Members that at the last meeting of Taunton Deane's Full Council on 15 July 2008, the Council's Constitution had been amended to reflect the previously agreed size of the Standards Committee and the new regulations under which the Committee operated.

36. Recruitment of the additional Parish Council Member to the Standards Committee

Reported that a letter had been sent to all Parish Councils inviting them to nominate suitable Councillors who would be willing to fill the additional parish "slot" on the Standards Committee.

As most Parish Councils did not meet during August, nominations had been invited before 26 September 2008. So far, only one name had been received.

Members agreed that a press release should be issued in due course in an attempt to attract further interest.

It was further agreed that all nominations received be submitted to the next meeting of the Standards Committee to enable a decision to be made as to who should fill the current vacancy.

37. Update on the appointment of an Independent Member to the Standards Committee

Reported that only one response had been received to the advertisement, placed in the Somerset County Gazette towards the end of June 2008, to fill the current vacancy on the Standards Committee for an Independent Member.

It was felt that a further advertisement should be placed in the Gazette, preferably in the "recruitment" section rather than as a public notice, to encourage further applications so a proper selection process could be undertaken.

Members also considered that it would be useful for the advertisement to be displayed perhaps on Parish Notice Boards or in village shop windows to increase possible interest.

38. Training and Liaison Programme

Mrs Meers reported that the Standards Committee's Training Day would be held again in January 2009 at County Hall. Possible dates were the 7, 28, 29 and 30 January. Members would be notified once the date had been finalised.

The Parish Liaison Officer, David Greig, reported that Code of Conduct Training had now been delivered to all Parish Councils in the Taunton Deane District.

Refresher training was regularly offered to enable those Parish Councillors who missed it first time around or those who had since been co-opted to learn about the Code.

In connection with the Parishes, Maurice Stanbury felt the "liaison programme" commenced last year, which involved the Independent Members of the Standards Committee attending meetings of Parish Councils to raise awareness of the ethics and probity work the Committee was undertaking, should be continued.

He understood that the Independent Members had been to over half of the Parish Councils and asked Mr Greig for details of those still to be visited.

The Chairman enquired if the Standards Committee could do anything to promote Chairmanship training for Parish Council's where it was perceived a need existed.

Mrs Meers confirmed that the Committee was responsible for promoting ethical standards and that such training was outside its remit. Mr Greig added that Parish Councils were an autonomous layer of Local Government and it would not therefore be possible to interfere with the way in which Parish meetings were chaired.

39. Date of the next meeting

The next meeting would be on Tuesday, 21 October 2008 at 2.15pm in the Committee Room No 2 at The Deane House.

(The meeting ended at 2.55 p.m.)