

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Committee
held on 13 December 2011 in the Council Chamber, Williton

Present:

Mr T Evans Chairman

Mr I Gunn
Councillor J Davis
Councillor D J Westcott

Councillor H J W Davies
Councillor P Grierson

Officers in Attendance:

Monitoring Officer (Bruce Lang)

Meeting Administrator (Elisa Day)

S30 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr M Parslow, Councillor S O de Renzy-Martin and Councillor J Sawyer.

The Monitoring Officer read out a letter of resignation received from Mr M Parslow. The Chairman recorded his thanks to Mr Parslow for his contribution to the Committee and it was unanimously agreed that a letter be sent to Malcolm on behalf of the committee putting on record their appreciation of his work during his time as a member of the Committee.

S31 Declarations of Interest

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Member of a County, Parish or Town Council:

Name	Minute No	Description of Interest	Personal or Prejudicial	Action Taken
Cllr P Grierson	All items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr D J Westcott	All items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and voted

S32 Public Participation

The Chairman confirmed that no member of the public had requested to speak on any agenda items.

S33 Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2011 – circulated with the agenda.

The Monitoring Officer updated the Committee on the Town and Parish Council training events. He advised that 51 people attended the evening training session and 27 people attended the afternoon session.

The Monitoring Officer also updated the Committee on the Review of the Constitution and confirmed that the West Somerset Council adopted the amendments to the Constitution as recommended by the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2011 be confirmed as a correct record.

S34 Appointment of Deputy Monitoring Officer

The Monitoring Officer reported that, following the Group Manager for Member Services Post having been made redundant, the Council had agreed to appoint Mr Ian Timms, Group Manager for Housing and Community, as Deputy Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

S35 Future of the Local Standards Framework

(Report No. WSC 149/11, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to advise the Committee that the Localism Bill had received Royal Assent and debate the arrangements to be put in place to consider the appropriate way forward in respect of a future Local Standards Framework for West Somerset.

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that the Localism Act would bring big changes to the Standards framework and the report set out his understanding of the main matters arising from the Act relating to standards of conduct. Whilst timescales had not been confirmed, it was understood that any new arrangements would need to be in place for April/May 2012.

The Act included a requirement to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members, with district, town and parish councils all being required to have a Code of Conduct. The district council was also to be responsible for having arrangements in place to consider allegations that a member of a district, town or parish council had failed to comply with its Code of Conduct. As part of these arrangements, the Council would be required to appoint at least one 'independent person' whose views must be sought and taken into account in respect of allegations that are received.

He expressed the view that it would be beneficial if the Committee were prepared to assist the Council in developing new arrangements to address the requirements from the Act including holding an informal workshop to work up proposals for the committee to formally recommend to the Council in March, 2012.

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that, should the Council still wish to have a Standards Committee, it would have to be politically proportional and would not be able to include Independent Members or Parish Council Representatives with full voting rights.

The Chairman advised that he was aware that the Committee would have many questions that unfortunately could not be answered yet until final timescales and regulations were issued.

Members felt it was positive that there was still a requirement for a Code of Conduct but raised concerns that there was a risk that each Parish could elements of a code that differed which would cause confusion.

Members requested the Monitoring Officer to send out any updated information on the Localism Act as and when it became available to help prepare for the workshop.

The Chairman indicated that he intended to have a meeting with the Leader and Chief Executive in the new year to discuss the whole issue.

RESOLVED that a workshop be arranged for January/February 2012 with a view to developing proposals that could form the basis of recommendations being put forward by the Standards Committee at its meeting in March to be considered by the Council later that same month.

S36 Monitoring Officer's Update

The Monitoring Officer submitted a progress report on activities undertaken since the last meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

S37 Standards Committee Workplan 2011/2012

The Monitoring Officer explained to the Committee that the main issues for the next meeting of the Committee would be recommendations to West Somerset Council on the way forward in the light of the Localism Act and developing an associated training programme in relation to this.

RESOLVED that the workplan be approved.

S38 Date for Next Meeting

It was confirmed that next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to commence at 4.30 pm on the 13 March 2012.

RESOLVED that the be report be noted

The meeting closed at 5.22 pm

The Chairman thanked all members of the Committee for their continued hard work and wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.