

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in the Cabinet Room, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 10 March 2005.

- PRESENT: Mr D Bristow - Chairman
- Councillors Mrs B E Boddington, P J Downes, J A P Eddy, Mrs K P Gregory, A Hansard, I R Muir and J Taylor.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Messrs D L Hall, D Macpherson and G Watkins.
- APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Mr D Pattison

24. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9th December 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

25. A CODE FOR THE FUTURE - CONSULTATION PAPER ON THE REVIEW OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS

A report by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing suggested responses to questions raised by a Consultation Paper published by the Standards Board for England as part of their review of the effectiveness of the Code of Conduct. Members noted that the deadline for responses to the Consultation Paper was 17th June 2005.

Members were of the view that the subject matter required more detailed examination than could be afforded at the meeting and were concerned that all District Councillors should be given the opportunity to comment on the Consultation Paper and the proposed responses. Therefore, the Committee suggested that all Members of the Council be asked to consider and comment on the content of the report of the Monitoring Officer and to indicate in their responses whether they would be interested in attending a workshop or similar event to discuss possible changes to the Code. Given that the consultation period expired on the 17th June, the Committee agreed to consider the report and responses received at a Special Meeting convened for that purpose. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer be requested to invite all District Councillors to comment on the Standards Board for England Consultation Paper on the Review of the Code of Conduct for Members and on the suggested responses by the Monitoring Officer to the questions raised;

- (b) that in formulating their replies, all Members of the Council be requested to indicate their interest or otherwise in attending a workshop or similar event on the Code of Conduct review;
- (c) that, in the event of a lack of interest, the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer be authorised, after consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee, not to proceed with the workshop arrangements; and
- (d) that a Special Meeting of the Committee be held at 4pm on Monday 6th June 2005 for the purpose of concluding a response to the Consultation Paper on behalf of the District Council to the Standards Board for England.

26. PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS - APPLICATION FOR DISPENSATION

The Committee were acquainted via a report by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) with an application received from Alconbury Parish Council for dispensation to allow six of their Members to speak and vote on matters relating to the Alconbury Flood Alleviation Scheme and any future related planning applications should they arise at meetings of the Parish Council.

Having regard to advice received from the Monitoring Officer, the Committee

RESOLVED

that dispensation to speak and vote be granted to six Members of Alconbury Parish Council for the period ending 30th April 2006 after which time applications for newly elected Councillors would need to be submitted should it be considered necessary.

27. MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT - STANDARDS BOARD NOTIFICATIONS

(Councillor P J Downes declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the following item by virtue of his involvement in one of the cases referred to in the Standards Board notifications and left the meeting for the duration of the discussion thereon.)

By reference to a report by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee noted that the Standards Board for England had decided not to take any further action in relation to an allegation made against a District Councillor but to refer for full investigation two cases involving Members of Bluntisham and Oldhurst Parish Councils.

Further to Minute No 19 of the meeting held on 9th December 2004, the Committee noted that the Councils' Insurers had confirmed that existing policy arrangements would meet any legal cost that might accrue from the defence of any claim for defamation or damages

awarded against an Investigating Officer or any other person mentioned in a report by that Officer in the event of an investigation into an alleged breach of the Members Code of Conduct locally.

28. CURRENT ISSUES

A report by the Democratic Services Manager was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which updated Members on the progress of the Select Committee Inquiry on "the Role and Effectiveness of the Standards Board for England" and provided information on the fourth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees to be held in Birmingham on 5th and 6th September 2005.

Having noted that the Annual Assembly would focus on the work of Standards Committees within local government and that the Monitoring Officer would confirm attendance at the conference at the next meeting of the Committee on 6th June 2005, it was

RESOLVED

that the Democratic Services Manager be authorised to reserve places at the fourth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees Conference to be held in Birmingham on 5th and 6th September 2005 for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, a representative of the Opposition Group on the Committee, an Independent Member and a Town and Parish Council representative (or their nominees).

29. PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED

- (a) that a Special Meeting of the Committee be held on Monday 6th June 2005 at 4 pm; and
- (b) that the programme of meetings of the Standards Committee in 2005/06 comprising 7th July, 8 September and 8th December 2005 and 9th March 2006 be noted.

Chairman