

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in the Chief Executive's Meeting Room, First Floor, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 7 December 2006.

PRESENT: Mr D H Bristow - Chairman

Councillors J D Ablewhite,
Mrs B E Boddington, D H Bristow,
P J Downes, D L Hall, D MacPherson,
I R Muir, T D Sanderson and G Watkins

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor R S Farrer

26. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14th September 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor J D Ablewhite to his first meeting of the Committee.

27. COUNCILLOR J TAYLOR

The Chairman paid tribute to Councillor J Taylor who had passed away in October adding, on behalf of the Committee, that he would miss him both for his contribution to meetings and also for his individuality.

28. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

None were declared.

29. LITTLE PAXTON PARISH COUNCIL - ALLEGED BREACH OF CODE OF CONDUCT

A report by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached a copy of the final report of the Investigating Officer in response to an allegation made against a Councillor serving on Little Paxton Parish Council. An open letter received from the complainant Mrs S Dean, (a copy of which also is appended in the Minute Book) was circulated to the Committee.

Having regard to the advice of the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer and having concluded that the Parish Councillor had a case to answer, it was

RESOLVED

that the report now submitted be received and the Director

of Central Services and Monitoring Officer be authorised to make the necessary arrangements to convene a Determination Hearing in accordance with the Local Authorities (Code of Conduct) (Local Determination) Regulations 2003.

30. APPLICATION FOR DISPENSATION

By way of a report by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee were acquainted with an application received for dispensation to allow four Members of Broughton Parish Council to speak and to vote on matters associated with proposed changes by Cambridgeshire County Council to footpath stiles in Broughton village.

The Committee were made aware that there were seven Members serving on the Parish Council of which three represented a quorum. Of those seven, the expectation was that four Members would declare a prejudicial interest requiring them to leave the meeting. The Committee recognised that the business of the Parish Council would not be impeded by the disclosure of the prejudicial interests and therefore were reluctant to grant dispensations to speak and to vote to the four Members concerned. However, having noted the Parish Council's preference for discussion on the footpaths project to be open to all Members and in light of the advice received from the Monitoring Officer, the Committee

RESOLVED

that dispensation to speak but not to vote be granted to four Councillors serving on Broughton Parish Council for the period ending 30th April 2008 to enable them to participate in discussion on footpath/access issues associated with a scheme promoted by Cambridgeshire County Council.

31. USE OF RESOURCES JUDGEMENTS 2005/6

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) in response to a requirement highlighted by the Audit Commission in their Use of Resources Judgements 2005/06 for "an assessment of the standards of ethical conduct across the organisation".

To comply with the requirement identified in KLOE 4.3 (key line of enquiry), Members noted that an annual survey of complaints by type, locality and outcome and of training received by Councillors (both District and Parish) would need to be undertaken and the outcomes reported to the Committee. A training programme for the following year could then be designed and targets set to meet any emerging trends and needs.

In terms of the assessment for 2006, the Committee noted details of the cases considered by the Board during the year and the training activity which had been undertaken or had been planned for the

future. Following discussion, the Committee requested the Monitoring Officer to consider distributing a model agenda to Parish Councils for use when convening meetings. Other than this comment, the Committee indicated their support for the continuation of the approach adopted by the Monitoring Officer towards the training of Parish Councils, in particular, and as there did not appear to be any commonalities in the cases considered by the Board which required to be addressed specifically, it was

RESOLVED

that the content of the report be noted together with the intention to report annually on the issues referred to in paragraph 1.5 of the report now submitted.

32. CODE OF CONDUCT - STANDARDS BOARD NOTIFICATION

The Committee received and noted a report by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding the decision of the Standards Board for England, not to take any further action in relation to an allegation made against a Councillor serving on Godmanchester Town Council.

33. CODE OF CONDUCT - UPDATE

By way of a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer updated the Committee on the projected timescale for the release, for consultation, by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) of a revised Model Code of Conduct and proposed arrangements to assist Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees in its implementation. Details of the key changes envisaged in the revised Code also were presented.

The Committee expressed their doubts that the timescale indicated by the DCLG could be met given that the revised Model Code had yet to be published but commended the Monitoring Officer to take up, on their behalf, any offer of joint training on the new Code made by other district authorities locally. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the content of the report be noted together with the possibility that a special meeting of the Committee might be convened at short notice to respond to consultation on a revised Code of Conduct.

34. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next ordinary meeting of the Committee would be held at 4pm on Thursday 8th March 2007.

Chairman