

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in Meeting Room 1, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 11 September 2008.

PRESENT: Mr D L Hall - Chairman
Councillors J D Ablewhite, P J Downes, A Hansard, I R Muir, T D Sanderson and G S E Thorpe

Messrs P B Boothman and G Watkins and Mrs S Stafford

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs B E Boddington and Messrs M Lynch and D MacPherson

20. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd July 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman welcomed Mrs S Stafford, newly appointed Independent Member to her first meeting of the Committee.

21. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

22. STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND: ANNUAL REVIEW - 2007/08

The Chairman reported that he had, at the request of the Leader of the Council, reviewed the content of the Annual Review document 2007/08 published by the Standards Board for England.

In the Chairman's opinion, the Review contained little that the Committee required to follow up. However, the Committee suggested that it might be useful if the DVD "The Code Uncovered" produced as a training aid for local authorities be made available to view by all Members of the Council. The Committee also requested that the part of the District Council's website relating to Standards and Conduct be enhanced by the inclusion of material relating to the new Standards Framework.

23. REPORT OF THE REFERRALS (ASSESSMENT) SUB-COMMITTEE

As Chairman of the Referrals (Assessment) Sub-Committee, Mr P L Boothman reported that the Sub-Committee had met on three occasions since its inception and had, in each case, decided not to

refer the allegations received for investigation but to refer the matters to the Monitoring Officer for other action. Mr Boothman added that, in making those decisions, the Sub-Committee had strived to be constructive and positive in the course of action that it had recommended to avoid a recurrence of similar situations/allegations arising.

In brief, Mr Boothman reported that the Sub-Committee had requested the Monitoring Officer to –

- ◆ advise a Councillor to exercise greater care in monitoring the content of press statements released in his name or office and to convey the Sub-Committee's concerns to those responsible for the drafting, authorisation and release of press statements;
- ◆ advise the Clerk to a Town Council that it would be prudent on their part to have regard to the timetable for the invitation of nominations for the election of Councillors and if necessary, to vary the date of publication for the Council's newsletter, to avoid the suggestion that existing Councillors might be using Council resources for political purposes; and
- ◆ present training on the Code of Conduct to a Parish Council before 31st October 2008 given the concerns of the Sub-Committee at the apparent level of understanding of the Code in the Parish currently.

24. REPORT OF THE REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE

It was noted that the Review Sub-Committee had not yet been required to meet.

25. LOG OF CODE OF CONDUCT ENQUIRIES

Further to Minute No. 42, Members received and noted details of Code of Conduct enquiries recorded by the Head of Legal and Estates and Monitoring Officer since the meeting of the Committee held on 3rd July 2008 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book).

The Monitoring Officer reported that, in future, the log would be anonymised to ensure that those wishing to seek advice were not discouraged from doing so.

26. REGISTRATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Committee received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Estates and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reminding Members that it was the duty of the Monitoring Officer to establish and maintain a register of interests of the Members and co-opted Members for all authorities in Huntingdonshire.

Having noted the up-to-date position in terms of the return of registration forms from the 73 Town and Parish Councils in the District and having noted that only 20 of the 672 Councillors elected or appointed to office were outstanding, the Committee requested the Monitoring Officer to specifically follow up those parishes/individuals

that had yet to submit their registration forms.

27. LOCAL ASSESSMENT: EXERCISE

By referral to the Local Assessment Complaint Handling Chart produced by the Standards Board for England, the Monitoring Officer guided Members through a training exercise during which one example case was reviewed and conclusions reached, in discussion, as to whether the case should be referred for further action or if not referred, the reasons for that decision. A copy of the material used in the exercise is appended in the Minute Book.

28. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday 4th December 2008 at 4pm.

Chairman