

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in Meeting Room CVSO1A, Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 9 September 2010.

PRESENT: Mr D L Hall - Chairman  
Councillors J D Ablewhite, Mrs B E Boddington, P J Downes, A Hansard, T D Sanderson and G S E Thorpe.

Messrs J Alexander, P Boothman and G Watkins.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Mr M Lynch and Mrs S Stafford.

### 17. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8th July 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 18. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

In response to concerns raised in respect of the alleged conduct of a Member present at the meeting, the Monitoring Officer advised that until or unless a complaint was formally submitted under the relevant Regulations there would not be any necessity for a Member to declare an interest or to leave the meeting.

### 19. REPORTS OF SUB-COMMITTEES

In the absence of the Chairman, the Monitoring Officer reported that the Referrals (Assessment) Sub-Committee had met on 28th July 2010 to assess a complaint received about a Member serving on Bluntisham Parish Council but that no further action had been taken as it was considered that the Member concerned was acting in his private capacity and not as a Councillor at the time of the alleged breach.

It was noted that the Review and Standards (Consideration and Hearing) Sub-Committees had not met since July.

### 20. STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND - LATEST ?

Having regard to a report by the Head of Law, Property and Governance and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee was reminded that the Government had announced its intention to abolish the Standards Board regime, a statement about which had been included in Section 4 of the

document "The Coalition: Our Plan for Governance" published in May 2010.

Members noted that although very little further information had emerged since that announcement, indications had suggested that the De-centralisation and Localism Bill to be published in the Autumn, would provide for the abolition of not just "Standards for England", but of the Code of Conduct for Members and of the Standards Committee. Notwithstanding the nature of the announcement, the Committee noted that, in all likelihood, a draft Bill might not be enacted before Summer 2011 which could mean that the Council retained the duty to continue the ethical standards regime until early 2012.

Against this background of uncertainty, the Committee noted the conclusions published in the Annual Review and Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life which appeared to suggest that an effective local standards framework should comprise all the elements inherent within the current code of conduct and standards regime.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the report now submitted be noted.

## **21. STANDARDS UPDATE**

The Committee received and noted a report by the Head of Law, Property and Governance and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding progress made on various issues contained in the Committee's 2010/2011 work programme.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the financial information contained in the "time and costs section" of the annual report had been enhanced prior to its distribution electronically to Members of the Council and Town and Parish Councillors.

In terms of the "frequently asked questions" prepared by the Monitoring Officer, the Committee requested that these be sent to Town and Parish Councils and Parish Clerks asked to draw the attention of their Members to the information contained in the document as a form of training aid.

In noting that the deadline for the receipt of applications for the vacant post of parish council representative on the Committee was 20th September, the Committee suggested, for the future, that it would be more conducive to the selection of Independent Members and parish council representatives if their terms of office did not run concurrently so as to avoid the possibility of a complete change of membership and loss of knowledge and experience at the same time.

Referring to the training activity to be undertaken by the Monitoring Officer in the Autumn and mindful of the uncertainty over the future of the standards regime, the Committee considered it imprudent currently to make arrangements for training sessions which might

involve expenditure and resources which ultimately could prove to be unnecessary.

However, and whilst deciding to await the publication of the De-centralisation and Localism Bill, the Committee asked the Monitoring Officer to respond positively to any requests for training received from individual parish councils and to reconsider the question of training at the next meeting in the light of the Government's proposals for "standards".

## **22. LOG OF CODE OF CONDUCT ENQUIRIES**

The Committee received and noted the Code of Conduct enquiries which had been recorded by the Head of Law, Property and Governance and the Monitoring Officer since the last meeting in July 2010 (an extract of the log is appended in the Minute Book).

## **23. SUMMARIES OF RECENTLY COMPLETED INVESTIGATIONS**

For training purposes, the Committee noted the content of cases recently published by "Standards for England" following complaints considered by Hyndburn Borough Council.

## **24. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held at 4pm on Thursday 2nd December 2010.

Chairman