

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held at Meeting Room 1, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon on Wednesday, 17 December 2003

PRESENT: Councillor P J Brant - Chairman
Councillors Mrs B E Boddington, J A P Eddy, J D Fell, A Hansard, C W Looker and J Taylor
Messrs D H Bristow, D L Hall, D MacPherson and G Watkins

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Mr D Pattison.

16. MINUTES

Subject to the preparation of an annex to the Minutes to record the detailed variations recommended by the Committee to the text of the Codes and Protocols referred to in Minute No. 11, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10th September 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17. ANTI-FRAUD AND CORRUPTION STRATEGY

A report was submitted by the Audit Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached a proposed Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy setting out the District Council's approach towards the tackling of fraud, corruption and theft.

It was explained that arrangements would be made to publicise the Strategy and supporting policies to the public, Members and employees using the local press, website and an edition of the Council's newsletter "District Wide". Having established that in certain circumstances internal disciplinary action as well as prosecution might be initiated against an employee, the Committee requested that the text of paragraph 2.1 of the Strategy be varied to reflect that "appropriate action" would be taken "in all instances where fraud, corruption and theft are found".

RESOLVED

that, subject to the deletion of the words "prosecution where" and "of" from the penultimate and last line of paragraph 2.1 of the Strategy and their replacement with "appropriate action in all instances where fraud, corruption and theft are found", the Cabinet be recommended to approve the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and to authorise the Audit Manager to take appropriate action to publicise the Strategy both within the District Council and to the public and external organisations.

18. WHISTLEBLOWING - POLICY AND PROCEDURE

By way of a report by the Audit Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Committee undertook its annual

review of the operation of the whistleblowing policy and procedure.

The Committee noted that one whistleblowing allegation had been received since the procedure had been last reviewed and that steps had been taken to publicise the policy both within the Council and externally. Having been advised that the identity of employees using the electronic disclosure form on the intranet was protected and that major contractors undertaking work for the District Council would be made aware of their entitlement to access the procedure, the Committee

RESOLVED

that the outcome of the annual review of the whistleblowing policy and procedure be noted.

19. LOCAL AUTHORITIES (CODE OF CONDUCT) (LOCAL DETERMINATIONS) REGULATIONS 2003

Further to Minute No. 12, the Committee considered a report by the Executive Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) proposing a draft procedure for the local investigation and determination of allegations against Councillors.

During debate, the Committee suggested that five Members should comprise a Panel charged with undertaking a determination hearing, that the procedure should be amended to clarify that the Investigating Officer was an appointee of the Standards Board for England and to offer the opportunity to the Investigating Officer equally to bring new matters forward in the same way as a Councillor was entitled so to do.

Subject to revision of the procedure as discussed, the Committee

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Executive Director of Central Services be authorised, after consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, to administer the pre-hearing process and to convene and to appoint Members to hearings as necessary; and
- (b) that the proposed procedure for the hearing of cases by the Committee be approved.

20. MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT - STANDARDS BOARD NOTIFICATIONS

By reference to a report by the Executive 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 allegations made against nine Members of the Development Control Panel and three ordinary Members of the Southoe and Midloe Parish Council but that it had referred to an Ethical Standards Officer a complaint made against the Chairman and one other Member of Southoe and Midloe

Parish Council.

21. APPLICATION FOR DISPENSATIONS

(Councillor C W Looker declared a personal interest in the following item in view of his membership of the Huntingdon and Godmanchester Twinning Association.)

The Committee were acquainted, via a report by the Executive Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) with an application received from Huntingdon Town Council for dispensations to allow six Members of their Twinning Sub-Committee to speak and vote in meetings of the Sub-Committee when matters arose relating to applications for grant and budgetary issues associated with their twinning functions.

Having regard to the advice of the Monitoring Officer, the Committee

RESOLVED

that dispensation to speak but not vote on budgetary issues associated with the twinning activities of the Huntingdon and Godmanchester Twinning Association be granted to six Members of the Twinning Sub-Committee of Huntingdon Town Council for the period ending 30th April 2007.

Councillor P J Brant
Chairman