

**STANDARDS – CURRENT ISSUES
(Report by the Democratic Services Manager)**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this report is –

- ◆ to advise Members of the appointment of a new Chief Executive to the Standards Board for England;
- ◆ to advise the Committee of training held recently at South Cambridgeshire District Council on Local Determination Hearings
- ◆ to update the Committee on the current position with regard to Local Authorities (Code of Conduct) (Local Determinations) (Amendments) Regulations 2003; and
- ◆ to invite the Committee to nominate representatives to attend the Third Annual Assembly of Standards Committees.

2. APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE

2.1 David Prince, currently Director of Strategy and Resources at the Audit Commission has been appointed Chief Executive to the Standards Board for England and will take up his new post in April. Members may recall that one of Mr Princes' past appointments included Director of Finance and Administration at Cambridgeshire County Council.

2.2 The Board has indicated that it will be the priority of the new Chief Executive to continue to work in Partnership with those bodies involved in the Local Government Community, meeting regularly to discuss issues of mutual interest and concern and to expedite arrangements for dealing with complaints.

3. TRAINING – LOCAL DETERMINATION REGULATIONS

3.1 Members will recall South Cambridgeshire District Council's offer to host a training event on the Local Determination Regulations and their invitation to Members serving on District Standards Committees in Cambridgeshire to attend.

3.2 In the event, District and Parish Councillors and Independent Members from East Cambridgeshire, South Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire and representatives from the Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils attended a joint training session in Cambridge on 24th February 2004. The event was led by the Head of Legal Services at South Cambridgeshire and supported by the Monitoring Officers attending from the other Districts.

3.3 Councillors Mrs Boddington and Hansard and Messrs Bristow and Hall attended from Huntingdonshire. The training comprised a factual introduction to the procedure to be followed in the investigation and

determination of allegations of misconduct locally by Councillors, including reference to the pre-hearing process, sanctions and notice of decisions. Those present also had the opportunity to apply the decision-making principles to a series of cases downloaded from the website of the Standards Board for England. A mock hearing which concluded the event was very well received by those in attendance.

4. LOCAL AUTHORITIES (CODE OF CONDUCT) (LOCAL DETERMINATIONS) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2003

4.1 At the meeting of the Committee held in December (Minute No.19 refers) Members approved a procedure to assist in the conduct of hearings in the event of the reference of cases from the Board to the Committee for local determination. It was also anticipated that whilst the Standards Board should continue to be the initial recipient of all allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct to ensure consistency, cases could be referred to the Standards Committee of a local authority for investigation, report and determination. Regulations to assist authorities in implementing these proposals have been expected for some time.

4.2 On 24th February, 2004 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister issued a second draft of S66 Regulations to provide a framework for Monitoring Officers to investigate allegations of misconduct that are referred to them by Ethical Standards Officers. It is the intention that the new arrangements will mean some investigations can be carried out at the level most appropriate to the alleged misconduct and speed up the investigations process overall.

4.3 It is understood that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be consulting widely on the draft Regulations and in this connection the Committee has been invited to respond to consultation papers issued by both the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Standards Board under Agenda Item 3 ante.

5. THIRD ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

5.1 The Third Annual Assembly of Standards Committees Conference is to take place at the International Conference Centre (ICC), Birmingham between 13th and 14th September 2004. The Conference provides an opportunity for Monitoring Officers, Members of Standards Committees and other local government professionals to discuss key issues and on this occasion the Conference will address the practical application of the Code of Conduct, its areas of difficulty and how it can be improved and will debate the role of the Code in the wider ethical framework. A comprehensive programme of presentations, plenary discussions and workshops will cover topics such as bullying, campaigning and planning.

5.2 Places are not limited and will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. However, in view of the District and Parish Council elections on 10th June, 2004 and the possibility that Membership of the Committee might vary it is suggested that places initially be reserved 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. The Monitoring Officer will be able to confirm attendance at the Conference following the meeting of the Committee on 1st July 2004.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The Committee is requested to –

- ◆ note the appointment of Mr David Prince as new Chief Executive to the Standards Board for England;
- ◆ note training undertaken on Local Government determination hearings hosted by South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- ◆ note the current position with regard to the provision of draft Regulations under the Local Authorities (Code of Conduct) (Local Determinations) (Amendment) Regulations 2003; and
- ◆ approve the attendance of Members of the Committee at the Third Annual Assembly of Standards Committees Conference.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Leaflet detailing the content of the Third Annual Assembly of Standards Committees.

Bulletin No. 16 – Standards Board for England.

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