

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

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee –
- ◆ of the response of Town and Parish Councils in Huntingdonshire to the training offered by the Monitoring Officer in September on the ethical framework and the code of conduct;
  - ◆ the recommendations of the Members' Independent Remuneration Panel;
  - ◆ the publication of the latest issue of Standards Committee News by the Standards Board; and
  - ◆ the launch of a review of the Code of Conduct by the Standards Board for England.

**2. TRAINING – TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS**

- 2.1 The Monitoring Officer reported to the last meeting on the training activity which had been offered to newly elected Parish Councillors and co-opted Members on the ethical framework and Code of Conduct during September.
- 2.2 Two sessions were held on 22nd and 30th September 2004. The second was arranged specifically for Members of St. Ives Town and Sawtry Parish Councils.
- 2.3 Whilst both events were well received by those present, overall attendance was disappointing with only representatives from Buckden, Earith, Hemingford Grey, Hemingford Abbots, Huntingdon Town, Little Paxton, Ramsey Town and Somersham Parish Councils attending the first and nine Councillors from St. Ives Town and Sawtry Parish Councils present at the second event. The Chairman of the Committee, Derek Bristow and Doug Hall, Independent Member attended both sessions.

**3. MEMBERS' INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL**

- 3.1 At the last meeting, the Monitoring Officer reported that the District Council's Independent Remuneration Panel was to meet on 4th November 2004 to consider, amongst other issues, the question of the payment of a separate (enhanced) co-optees allowance to an Independent Member who may become Chairman of the Standards Committee.
- 3.2 Mindful of the Allowances Regulations and having regard to advice received from the Standards Board for England, the Independent Remuneration Panel has recommended to the Council that an Independent Chairman of the Standards Committee should be paid a co-optees allowance equivalent to the amount which would be paid

were an elected Member Chairman of the Committee – currently £2,250. The co-optees allowance will be payable in each Municipal Year for chairmanship of the Committee, including the presentation of the Committee's Report to Council, and for attendance at conferences and training courses. The Council, at its meeting on 8th December 2004, will be recommended to approve the payment of this allowance.

#### **4. STANDARDS COMMITTEE NEWS**

4.1 The Standards Board for England recently published the latest issue of Standards Committee News. This relatively new initiative contains useful information for Members of Standards Committees and can be accessed via the website of the Standards Board for England at [www.standardsboard.co.uk](http://www.standardsboard.co.uk) publications.

4.2 The Committee may be aware that new guidance recently has been published by the Board to help Members consider whether they need to declare personal and prejudicial interests if they are involved in lobby or campaign groups or are Members of more than one relevant authority – so called “dual-hated” Members. A copy of the latest guidance in booklet form is enclosed for members of the Committee only.

#### **5. REVIEW OF THE CODES OF CONDUCT**

5.1 Those Members who attended the third annual assembly of Standards Committees in Birmingham in September will be aware that the Standards Board for England announced their intention to commence a consultation process on reviewing the Members' Code of Conduct. Brief details have now emerged as to how the consultation is to be conducted.

5.2 The review of the Code of Conduct will be launched early in the New Year when all Councils will received a consultation paper from the Board setting out the key issues. The issues will address those questions which have arisen in discussions with Monitoring Officers and Members on ways to improve the code. Among the questions which will be posed are –

- ◆ to what extent should the Code of Conduct apply in a private capacity?
- ◆ should the Code of Conduct continue to include a whistleblowing provision?
- ◆ how can the Code of Conduct strike a balance between Members representing their communities and protecting the integrity of decision-making?
- ◆ should Members be allowed the same rights as the public when making representations on issues in which they have a prejudicial interest? and
- ◆ Should there be a public interest defence to the disclosure of confidential information?

5.3 The consultation is expected to close in the Spring to enable the Board to make recommendations for change on the Codes of Conduct to the Government thereafter. Should the Committee be required to respond to the consultation in advance of its next scheduled meeting on 10th March 2005, the Monitoring Officer will consider the convening of a special meeting of the Committee for that purpose.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

6.1 The Committee is requested to note the contents of the report.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Standards Committee News 03.

Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel – November 2004.

**Contact Officer: Christine Deller, Democratic Services Manager**  
**☎ (01480) 388007**