
Standards Committee

Report of the meetings held on 6th & 24th July and
14th September 2006

Matters for Information

**1. THE STUKELEYS PARISH COUNCIL –
ALLEGED BREACH OF CODE OF CONDUCT**

The Committee has accepted the findings of an Investigating Officer in respect of allegations made against two Councillors serving on The Stukeleys Parish Council.

After careful consideration of the facts set out in the report of the Investigating Officer and having regard to advice from the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer, the Committee has concluded that neither councillor had a case to answer and that there was no breach of the code of conduct adopted by The Stukeleys Parish Council.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Code of Conduct) (Local Determination) (Amendment) Regulations 2004, a notice to this effect has been published in the Hunts Post.

2. APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATION

Having regard to advice received from the Monitoring Officer, the Committee has approved applications for dispensation received from Alconbury and Buckden Parish Councils for the period ending 30th April 2010.

Six Members of Alconbury Parish Council who might otherwise have been prohibited from participating will now be able to speak and vote on matters relating to a flood alleviation scheme when it is considered by the Parish in the autumn. Having regard to the application from Buckden Parish Council, and in granting dispensation to fifteen Members of that Council to conduct business relating to the Village Hall and Recreation Ground Trust, the Committee has reiterated their concern at a position whereby all Members of a local council act as trustees to a community facility given the inevitable conflict of interests which may arise. The Parish Council has been urged to contact the Charity Commission for advice on reviewing their trustee arrangements to overcome such difficulties. Similar advice also will be offered by the Monitoring Officer to all Town and Parish Councils in the District.

3. CODE OF CONDUCT – STANDARDS BOARD NOTIFICATIONS

In accordance with the procedure adopted by the Standards Board for England, the Committee has been informed that the Board has decided not to take any further action in relation to allegations made against three Members of the District Council and one councillor serving on Ramsey Town Council.

In the cases of two other Ramsey Town councillors, the Board has requested more information from the complainant which will determine whether further action needs to be taken.

4. THE ‘CASE ALERT’

Further to Item No. 13 of their Report to the meeting of the Council held on 19th April 2006, the Committee has noted the launch, by the Standards Board for England, of a new facility entitled “Case Alert”. The “Case Alert” will provide regular in-depth analysis of significant cases and best practice guidance drawing upon decisions by Standards Committees, the Adjudication Panel for England and the High Court. The “Case Alert” will be submitted to future meetings of the Committee and the attention of town and parish councils will continue to be drawn to any issues highlighted in the cases selected.

5. STANDARDS AND CONDUCT WEBSITE

Following an approach by a Vice-Chairman of a parish council regarding the composition of the standards and conduct pages on the District Council’s website and having reviewed the practices of other authorities locally, it has been agreed that the website be amended to indicate that correspondence for the Independent Members and Parish Council representatives on the Committee be sent care of the District Council’s offices at Pathfinder House.

6. TRAINING ROUND UP

The Committee has noted the various activities undertaken by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer to fulfil its obligations in terms of training and advice to councillors on issues relating to the local ethical framework and code of conduct. Individual and group sessions have been held involving 10 parish councils and 5 new district councillors and the Monitoring Officer has led a session organised by the Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils to which councillors from all Cambridgeshire parishes had been invited.

The Monitoring Officer also has been directed by the Standards Board for England, under Section 66(6) of the Local Government Act 2000 and associated Regulations to provide training and guidance to all members of Sawtry Parish Council on the Code of Conduct. Steps are being taken to enable the Monitoring Officer to comply with this direction.

7. A NEW APPROACH TO LOCAL INVESTIGATIONS

The Standards Board for England is evolving into a strategic body which will investigate only those cases which set important precedents and those which, for various reasons, cannot be handled locally. This trend has been underway now for some 18 months and increasingly, cases are being referred to the Monitoring Officer for investigation locally.

The Committee has noted that, as part of its new role as regulator, the Board has devised an approach to monitoring local investigations so they can ensure that any concerns that may emerge during the investigation, in terms of process/timescale/interpretation can be dealt with in a timely and appropriate way. The Committee also has noted the Board's recommendation in respect of the appointment of investigators and the need for Monitoring Officers to satisfy themselves that the person appointed has the necessary skills and resources needed to undertake the investigation thoroughly.

D H Bristow
Chairman