

**USE OF RESOURCES JUDGEMENTS 2005/06**  
**(Report by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer)**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Use of Resources Judgement, designed by the Audit Commission, assesses how well Councils manage and use their financial resources. The assessment focuses on the importance of having sound and strategic financial management to ensure that resources are available to support the Council's priorities and improve services.
- 1.2 Specifically, the assessment covers five themes, as follows;
- ◆ Financial reporting
  - ◆ Financial management
  - ◆ Financial standing
  - ◆ Internal controls; and
  - ◆ Value for money.
- 1.3 Each of the above themes is scored by the District Council, in the first instance, on a 1-4 basis, 1 equating to inadequate performance, 2 representing adequate performance, 3 good performance and 4 innovative practice. In March 2006, the Audit Commission released the overall judgement to the Council which although subject to some final tinkering will require follow up action in preparation for next years judgements.
- 1.4 Overall the Council achieved a score of 3 for the 2005/06 judgements, which represents an assessment of good performance on the Audit Commission's scoring system. Although there were no areas where the Council failed to achieve level 2 performance there were various level 3 requirements which were not met and the Council has been advised to consider the potential benefit to the organisation of strengthening its original arrangements with regard to internal control. Under the theme – Internal Control sits the key line of enquiry (KLOE 4.3) which requires the Council to have arrangements in place that promote and ensure probity and propriety in the conduct of its business. In particular, the Audit Commission has recommended that the Council undertake “an assessment of the standards of ethical conduct across the organisation”.
- 1.5 Taking advice on what action needs to be taken to comply with this request, it is understood that an annual survey of complaints by type, locality and outcome and of training undertaken by Councillors (both District and Parish) would need to be undertaken and the outcomes reported to the Standards Committee. The training programme for the following year would then need to be designed and targeted to meet any emerging trends and needs.
- 1.6 To fulfil this requirement, it is proposed that a report be submitted to the December meeting of the Committee on an annual basis.

## **2. ANNUAL SURVEY**

- 2.1 In accordance with the procedure adopted by the Standards Board for England, the Monitoring Officer has been notified of decisions taken by the Board in eight cases during 2006, details of which are reflected in the appendix hereto.
- 2.2 In all but one case, the Board agreed not to take any further action in relation to the allegations made and in the other case the Standards Committee found that there was no case to answer.
- 2.3 Looking at the paragraphs of the model Code of Conduct which were alleged to have been breached, five complaints involved (potentially) paragraph 4 – “a Member must not in his official capacity or any other circumstance, conduct himself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing his office or authority into disrepute”. This is a broad area of the Code and therefore it could not be inferred that any trend was emerging because this paragraph featured more frequently in complaints than any other.
- 2.4 There do not appear to be any other commonalities, in the cases which have been considered by the Board, which require to be addressed by the Committee.

## **3. TRAINING TARGETS**

- 3.1 Members will recall the report of the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer to the last meeting (Minute No. 22 refers). In this report, the Monitoring Officer described the training activity he had undertaken or had planned for the autumn/winter.
- 3.2 Two newly elected Members of the Stukeleys Parish Council had attended the general training event in July. The occurrence of a formal complaint in the Parish had encouraged the Parish Clerk to offer the training opportunity to his newly elected Councillors.
- 3.3 As several Members of Ramsey Town Council have been involved in recent complaints made to the Board and whilst these had not been pursued, the Monitoring Officer led a training session at a meeting of the Town Council in September. Similar arrangements have been made with Grafham Parish Council and the Monitoring Officer will attend a future meeting of that Parish in the New Year. An approach also has been made to Earith Parish Council.
- 3.4 Members are reminded that an allegation had been made against a Member serving on Sawtry Parish Council. Following assessment by an Ethical Standards Officer and representations by the Monitoring Officer, the Board issued a direction to the Monitoring Officer to provide training and guidance to all Members of the Parish Council on the Code of Conduct with particular reference to the obligations imposed in respect of personal and prejudicial interests. As Sawtry Parish Council have declined to receive training and guidance from the Monitoring Officer on the Code of Conduct the matter remains with the Standards Board for England to resolve.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 The Monitoring Officer continues to target and respond to Parish Councils in terms of their compliance with the Code of Conduct as circumstances evolve and a need for training is identified. Indeed, further training for Little Paxton Parish Council has been recommended by the Investigating Officer as a result of the formal complaint made in that Parish. Targeting of individual Councils together with open sessions has resulted in a total of 239 Councillors being trained since the inception of the model Code of Conduct and it is suggested that this approach be continued.
- 4.2 The Committee is invited to note this report and in particular, the proposal to report annually on the issues referred to in paragraph 1.5.

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Huntingdonshire District Council – Use of Resources Judgements 2005/06  
Previous Standards Committee report and minutes

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