

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in Meeting Room 1, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 13 September 2007.

PRESENT: Mr D L Hall - Chairman
Councillors J D Ablewhite, P J Downes, R S Farrer, I R Muir and G S E Thorpe.
Messrs P B Boothman, M Lynch, D MacPherson and G Watkins.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs B E Boddington and T D Sanderson

15. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5th July 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor J D Ablewhite declared a personal interest in Minute No. 18 by virtue of his involvement in the case reported.

17. ARTICLE 9 - STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Further to Item No. 13 of the Minutes of the meeting held on 5th July 2007, the Committee received and noted the content of Article 9 of the Constitution relating to the Standards Committee (a copy of Article 9 is appended in the Minute Book).

It was further noted that an updated copy of the Constitution would be forwarded to the Independent Members and Parish Council representatives in due course.

18. CODE OF CONDUCT - NOTIFICATIONS

(See Item No. 16 for Members' Interests).

The Committee received and noted a report by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding the decision of the Standards Board for England not to take any further action in relation to allegations made against one Member of the District Council and six Councillors serving on St. Ives Town Council.

In discussion, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that lack of knowledge/understanding was unlikely to be considered by the

Standards Board for England as an acceptable reason for non-compliance with the Code of Conduct.

19. CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS - THE FUTURE

By way of a report by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Members were advised of the implications for the Committee's workload of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill which was expected to receive Royal Assent in the Autumn and come into force in April 2008.

The Committee were informed that the Bill proposed two key changes to the management of compliance with the Code of Conduct including a requirement for Standards Committees to receive and make initial assessments of conduct allegations relating to the Code. The Standards Board would assume a strategic and regulatory role providing supervision, support and guidance to local authorities to ensure a degree of consistency in the application of the Code.

Although noting the Standards Board assessment of the likely impact of the changes on the majority of authorities, the Committee acknowledged that, whilst this information was useful, an accurate picture of the extent of the workload involved would only emerge once the new regime was in operation. Whilst recognising that further information would be available once the Bill received Royal Assent, Members anticipated that there would need to be an increase in the number the meetings of the Committee and/or Sub-Committees and perhaps a requirement for an additional Parish Council representative.

As Standards Committees also would be able to resolve cases by alternative means such as mediation or training, the Chairman undertook to raise the issue of shared expertise in mediation at a forthcoming meeting of the Cambridgeshire Standards Committees Network. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the report now submitted be received and noted.

20. TRAINING UPDATE

Members received and noted a report by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which updated the Committee on the response received to the training activity undertaken by the Monitoring Officer on the new Code of Conduct.

Given the disappointing response by District Councillors to the sessions held thus far, the Monitoring Officer indicated his intention to encourage those Members who had not yet attended to make every effort to do so at an additional event programmed to take place after the Council meeting in September.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Committee was invited to view "The Code Uncovered" – a DVD produced by the Standards Board for

England.

21. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held at 4pm on Thursday 6th December 2007.

Chairman