
Standards Committee

Report of the meeting held on 6th March 2008

Matters for Information

**15. APPLICATION FOR DISPENSATION –
PIDLEY-CUM-FENTON PARISH COUNCIL**

Following advice offered in response to an enquiry on the various interests held by Members serving on Pidley-cum-Fenton Parish Council, it had become apparent that Members of that Council required a dispensation to enable them to continue to consider applications for financial assistance received from the Village Hall Management Committee.

Having regard to the Parish Council's request, the Committee was satisfied that approval of the application in these circumstances was required to prevent the business of the Parish Council from being impeded. The Committee has, therefore, granted a dispensation to five Members of Pidley-cum-Fenton Parish Council to enable them to speak and vote for the period ending 30th April 2008, after which time an application for the newly elected Councillors will need to be submitted should this still be considered necessary.

16. SURVEY OF CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS

To comply with an Audit Commission requirement identified in KLOE 4.3 (Key Line of Enquiry), details of Code of Conduct complaints received by the Standards Board for England relating to Huntingdonshire and the parishes within the District are presented to the Committee annually.

As Members had commented on the usefulness of this information, the Monitoring Officer has produced an analysis of cases considered by the Board since the introduction of the ethical standards regime in 2001 which has been noted by the Committee.

17. LOG OF CODE OF CONDUCT ENQUIRIES

In Item No. 11 of their Report to the meeting of the Council held on 20th February 2008, the Committee reported that they had requested the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer to initiate a process which would record Code of Conduct enquiries received from town and parish clerks and councillors and inform the Committee of those areas of the Code which gave rise to the most enquiries.

Having noted details of the thirteen enquiries received by the Monitoring Officer since the process began in January, the Committee is of the view that the record could prove to be a valuable reference tool when the local assessment regime commences.

18. CODE OF CONDUCT

Standards Board Notification

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 an allegation made against a Councillor serving on St. Neots Town Council.

Fact Sheets

The Committee has noted the content of two fact sheets produced by the Standards Board for England on sections of the Code of Conduct relating to gifts and hospitality and personal and prejudicial interests.

19. INDEPENDENT ADJUDICATOR: NEW ROLE FOR STANDARDS COMMITTEES

Under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the role of Independent Adjudicator is to be abolished and responsibility for the granting of and supervision of exemptions of certain local authority posts from political restrictions is to be transferred to local authority standards committees. Guidance on the precise duties to be undertaken by the Committee is still awaited from the Department for Communities and Local Government, as is any indication of the timing of the transfer of functions. In the meantime, the Committee has acknowledged that there will be a requirement to vary its terms of reference and to consider the necessity for a Member briefing or training on the new function.

20. LOCAL ASSESSMENT: EXERCISE

Having regard to early guidance published by the Standards Board for England to help prepare local government for the local assessment of code of conduct cases, the Committee has requested the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer to make arrangements for Members to engage in a training exercise to help prepare the Committee for the commencement of the new local assessment regime currently anticipated for implementation with effect from 1st April 2008.

D L Hall
Chairman