

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, 6 March 2008.

PRESENT: Mr D L Hall – Chairman
Councillors J D Ablewhite,
Mrs B E Boddington, P J Downes, I R Muir
and G S E Thorpe.

Messrs P Boothman, M Lynch and
G Watkins.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors R S Farrer and T D Sanderson and Mr D MacPherson

38. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Committee held on 31st January 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

39. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors J D Ablewhite and P J Downes and Messrs P Boothman and G Watkins declared a personal interest in Minute No. 41 by virtue of their personal involvement or close association with the individuals involved in the cases referred to.

Councillor G S E Thorpe declared a personal interest in Minute No. 44 by virtue of his membership of St. Neots Town Council.

40. APPLICATION FOR DISPENSATION

A report by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding a request received for dispensation from five Members serving on Pidley-cum-Fenton Parish Council.

The Monitoring Officer explained that following advice offered to the Parish Clerk in response to an inquiry on the various interests held by Council Members, it had become apparent that Members of the Parish Council required dispensation to enable them to continue to consider applications for financial assistance received from the Village Hall Management Committee.

In accordance with the Relevant Authorities (Standards Committee) (Dispensations) Regulations 2002 and having been satisfied that approval was required to prevent the business of the Parish Council from being impeded, the Committee

RESOLVED

that dispensation to speak and vote be granted to five Members of Pidley-cum-Fenton Parish Council for the period ending 30th April 2008 to enable them to conduct business involving the award of grant to the Village Hall Management Committee.

41. SURVEY OF CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS: 2002 - 2006

(See Minute No. 39 for Members' Interests).

Further to Minute No. 29, the Committee received and noted a presentation (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) of the cases reported to the Standards Board for England relating to Huntingdonshire District and parishes since the introduction of the ethical standards regime in 2001.

42. LOG OF CODE OF CONDUCT ENQUIRIES

In response to a request by the Committee at their meeting held on 6th December 2007 (Minute No. 29 refers), Members received and noted a record of Code of Conduct enquiries received by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer since the commencement of the log in January 2008 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book).

Members were of the view that this new initiative could prove to be a valuable reference tool when the local assessment regime commences.

43. CODE OF CONDUCT - FACT SHEETS

Members received and noted the content of two fact sheets produced by the Standards Board for England on the sections of the Code of Conduct relating to gifts and hospitality and personal and prejudicial interests (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book).

44. CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINT - STANDARDS BOARD NOTIFICATION

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 a Councillor serving on St. Neots Town Council.

45. INDEPENDENT ADJUDICATOR: NEW ROLE FOR STANDARDS COMMITTEES

Further to Minute No. 36 and 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 reminded of the proposal, under the Local Government and Public Involvement In Health Act 2007, to abolish the role of Independent Adjudicator and to transfer the responsibility for the granting and supervision of exemptions of certain

local authority posts from political restrictions to local authority Standards Committees.

Members noted that guidance on the precise duties to be undertaken by the Committee still was awaited from the Department for Communities and Local Government as was any indication of the timing of the transfer of functions. Therefore and having acknowledged that there would be a requirement to vary the Committee's terms of reference and to consider the necessity for a Member briefing or training on the new functions, the Committee

RESOLVED

that, in accordance with the advice of the Standards Board for England, the intention of the Government to vary the duties and responsibilities of Standards Committees be noted.

46. LOCAL ASSESSMENT: EXERCISE

Further to Minute No. 36, 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) which drew attention to some early guidance published by the Standards Board for England to help prepare local government for the local assessment of Code of Conduct cases.

Having discussed the complaint handling flow chart and the details of the case submitted, Members recognised that it would be beneficial if arrangements could be made by the Monitoring Officer for the Committee to engage in a training exercise at the conclusion of the next meeting.

The Committee also were of the view that careful consideration needed to be given to the content of letters of response to complainants particularly in circumstances where it would not fall to the Standards Committee to deal with the complaint.

47. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next ordinary meeting of the Committee would be held at 4pm on Thursday 3rd July 2008.

Chairman