
Standards Committee

Report of the meetings held on 3rd July and 11th September 2008

Matters for Information

5. CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS - STATISTICS

The Committee has been notified that the Standards Board for England has decided not to take any further action in relation to allegations of breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct made against two Councillors serving on St Ives Town Council.

It is the role of the Committee to monitor the operation of and advise and train Members on matters relating to the Code. In order to monitor the number and type of issue that has arisen, the Committee now receive details of Code of Conduct enquiries recorded by the Head of Legal and Estates and Monitoring Officer on a quarterly basis. This information has proved useful to the Committee in identifying which areas of the Code appear to give rise to the greatest concerns.

At the same time, the Committee has noted, with interest, information published by the Standards Board which illustrates the number of allegations received by the Board during the period 1st April 2007 to 31st March 2008 and the referral and investigation statistics over the same period.

6. STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND: ANNUAL REVIEW

On behalf of the Committee and at the request of the Leader, the Chairman has reviewed the content of the Annual Review document 2007/08 published by the Standards Board for England. Although the review contained little that needed to be followed up, the Committee has suggested that the DVD "The Code Uncovered", produced as a training aid for local authorities be made available for view by all Members of the Council. The DVD, which will be shown on the rising of the Council, focuses on a Planning Committee meeting and highlights key changes to the revised Code of Conduct specifically examining the rules relating to the declaration of interests, the disclosure of confidential information and bullying.

The Committee also has requested that that part of the District Council's website relating to standards and conduct be enhanced by the inclusion of material relating to the new standards framework.

7. REFERRALS (ASSESSMENT) SUB COMMITTEE

Further to Item No. 1 of their Report to the meeting held on 25th June 2008, the Committee has now received a report from the Chairman of the Referrals (Assessment) Sub Committee, which has responsibility for the initial assessment of Code of Conduct allegations. The Sub Committee has met on three occasions since its inception and in each case decided not to refer the allegations received for investigation but to refer the matters to the Monitoring Officer for other action. In making those decisions, the Sub Committee has strived to be constructive and positive in the course of action that it has recommended to avoid a re-currence of similar situations/allegations arising.

Accordingly, the Monitoring Officer has

- ◆ advised a Councillor to exercise greater care in monitoring the content of press statements released in his name or office and conveyed the Sub Committee's concerns to those responsible for the drafting, authorisation and release of press statements;
- ◆ advised the Clerk to a Town Council that it would be prudent on their part to have regard to the timetable for the invitation of nominations for the election of Councillors and if necessary vary the date of publication for the Council's newsletter to avoid the suggestion that existing Councillors might be using Council resources for political purposes; and
- ◆ undertaken to present training on the Code of Conduct to a Parish Council before 31st October 2008 given the concerns of the Sub Committee at the apparent level of understanding of the Code in the Parish currently.

8. REGISTRATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Under Section 81 of the Local Government Act 2000, the Monitoring Officer has a duty to establish and maintain a register of interests of the Members and co-opted Members for all authorities in Huntingdonshire. The Committee has noted the up to date position in terms of the return of registration forms from the 73 town and parish councils in Huntingdonshire. Of the 672 Councillors elected or appointed to office only 20 are outstanding. Whilst aware that Council Members are regularly reminded to review their registerable interests, the Committee has requested the Monitoring Officer to specifically follow up those parishes/individuals that have yet to submit their registration forms.

9. LOCAL ASSESSMENT: EXERCISES

Over their last two meetings, the Monitoring Officer has conducted a local assessment exercise, for training purposes, using example cases.

D L Hall
Chairman