

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 4 December 2008.

PRESENT: Mr D L Hall - Chairman

Councillors J D Ablewhite,
Mrs B E Boddington, P J Downes, A Hansard
and G S E Thorpe.
Messrs P L Boothman and G Watkins and
Mrs S Stafford.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors I R Muir and T D Sanderson and Mr M Lynch.

34. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20th November 2008 were approved as correct record and signed by the Chairman.

It was reported that the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils had nominated two new parish Councillors to serve on the Committee and that they would commence their duties with effect from 1st January 2009. At the same, the Chairman announced the resignation of Councillor D McPherson as parish council representative and on behalf of Members paid tribute to Councillor McPherson for his contribution to the work of the Committee since its inception particularly during the formation and implementation of the first Model Code of Conduct. The Democratic Services Manager undertook to convey these sentiments to Councillor McPherson.

35. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

36. REPORT OF THE REFERRALS (ASSESSMENT) SUB-COMMITTEE

Mr P L Boothman, Chairman of the Referrals (Assessment) Sub Committee reported briefly on the cases which had been considered by the Sub Committee since the last meeting. Of these, it was noted that one allegation had been referred for investigation and one referred to the Monitoring Officer for other action including training. No further action was to be taken in the remaining case.

It was further noted that the Review Sub Committee had not yet been required to meet.

37. CODES OF CONDUCT FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY MEMBERS AND EMPLOYEES

By way of a report by the Head of Legal and Estates Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Committee considered their response to a consultation paper published by the Department of Communities and Local Government entitled "Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power: Codes of Conduct for Local Authority Members and Employees – A Consultation" which had invited views on proposals to revise the Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2007, by 24th December 2008. Members noted that a new code incorporating the outcome of the consultation process would come into effect by May 2009.

The Committee were made aware that the most significant revision to the Members Code involved the issue of "private capacity" to cover those occasions where a Members' criminal behaviour in a private capacity brings disrepute to a local authority.

In their discussion on the content of the suggested responses, the Committee drew particular attention to question 5 relating to the commencement of an investigation before a criminal process had been completed and proposed that the word "extreme" in the first line of the second paragraph of the suggested response be highlighted in bold and the word "potentially" be inserted after the word "may" in the second line of the same paragraph both to underline the Committee's view that the circumstances that the response described would be rare and infrequent.

Having expressed their satisfaction with the remainder of the suggested responses and noted that the part of the consultation paper relating to a Code of Conduct for Employees would be considered by the Employment Panel, the Committee

RESOLVED

that the suggested responses to the consultation paper "Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power: Codes of Conduct for Local Authority Members and Employees" be forwarded on behalf of the District Council to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

38. USE OF RESOURCES JUDGEMENTS 2007/08

A report by the Head of Legal and Estates Services was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) in response to the requirement of the Audit Commission to undertake, in compliance with KLOE 4.3 (Key Line of Enquiry) an "assessment of the standards of ethical conduct across the organisation". The report presented featured the 2007/08 annual review and evidence base required by the Audit Commission.

In endorsing the continuation of the approach to training previously adopted by the Monitoring Officer, the Committee asked whether the quality status awarded to parish councils involved any undertaking to receive refresher training on the Code of Conduct at regular intervals. Having noted that the Head of Legal and Estates would make

enquiries in the respect, it was

RESOLVED

that the content of the annual report be noted.

39. LOG OF CODE OF CONDUCT ENQUIRIES

Further to Minute No. 42, the Committee received and noted the nature of the Code of Conduct enquiries which had been recorded by the Head of Legal and Estates since their last meeting held on the 11th September 2008 (an extract of the log is appended in the Minute Book).

40. ATTENDANCE AT FUTURE MEETINGS

Arising from the Chairman's attendance at the recent Standards Committee Conference and the recommendations he had noted for enhancing the profile and work of the Committee, Members discussed whether it would be appropriate to extend an invitation to the Leader of the Council and Leader of the Opposition to address the Committee at a future meeting.

In supporting the suggestion and the opportunity it could offer to discuss the Council's expectations of the Committee, and at the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Downes endorsed the proposal and expressed his desire for the Committee to be given the opportunity to debate rather than just respond to different "standards" issues.

41. LOCAL ASSESSMENT: EXERCISE

For training purposes and by reference to example case material (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Monitoring Officer guided the Committee through a local assessment exercise following which it was concluded by Members that it would not have been appropriate to refer the case for investigation.

42. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on Thursday 5th March 2009 at 4pm.

Chairman