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## **Standards Committee**

### **Report of the meeting held on 5th March 2009**

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#### **Matters for Information**

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#### **17. REFERRALS (ASSESSMENT) SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Chairman of the Referrals (Assessment) Sub-Committee has reported on five cases which have been considered recently and the Committee has noted that no further action was required to be taken by the Monitoring Officer in each case.

#### **18. APPOINTMENT OF STANDARDS (CONSIDERATION AND HEARING) SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Committee has appointed the Chairman, Councillors J D Ablewhite and Mrs B E Boddington, Parish Councillor M J Reece and Mr P Boothman to the Standards (Consideration and Hearing) Sub-Committee which will consider reports arising from the investigation of complaints involving breaches of the code of conduct. The Sub-Committee will also hold determination hearings as necessary.

#### **19. ETHICAL STANDARDS REGIME IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HUNTINGDONSHIRE**

In accordance with Standards Board guidance, the Leader of the Opposition, Councillor P J Downes has addressed the Committee on his perceptions of the ethical standards regime both locally and nationally. The Leader of the Council has been invited to attend a subsequent meeting.

Despite having reservations about the role of the Standards Board, Councillor Downes has indicated his support for the work of the Committee locally and has welcomed the introduction of the Model Code of Conduct and particularly the obligation for Councillors to declare, when necessary, any personal and prejudicial interests in business under consideration.

Whilst commending the concept of standards in local government and acknowledging that there had been a marked improvement in the performance of some local councils, he indicated that he remained unconvinced that all parish councils clearly understood the aspect of the Code relating to the declaration of interests. In this respect, Councillor Downes endorsed a continuation of the Committee's approach to training. He also expressed some concern at the limited sanctions available to local committees which resulted in the more serious cases of misconduct being referred to the Standards Board.

For the future, Councillor Downes was hopeful that the Government might extend the Committee's remit to consider cases involving infringements of electoral law and the behaviour of Councillors during election campaigns.

The Committee has thanked Councillor Downes for his contribution to its meeting which prompted an interesting debate.

## **20. THE CASE TRIBUNALS (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2008**

The Committee has noted that the Case Tribunals (England) Regulations came into effect on 12th December 2008.

Principally, the Regulations prescribe the sanctions available to a Case Tribunal of the Adjudication Panel for England, where it has determined that a Councillor has failed to comply with his or her Authority's code of conduct. Sanctions range from censoring a Member to disqualification from service for five years, training or requesting the submission of an apology.

## **21. QUALITY STATUS FOR PARISH COUNCILS**

The Committee was pleased to note that the Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme requires town and parish councils to demonstrate that they have reached the standard required by passing several tests, one of which relates to the Code of Conduct. However, the Committee has expressed disappointment that the scheme does not require a commitment to regular refresher training on the Code.

In debating how to encourage the introduction of such a requirement to the scheme, the Committee was disappointed to hear that the administrative burden and cost of acquiring quality status can be onerous and prohibitive to local councils and thus had affected the take-up and coverage of the scheme locally.

## **21. LOG OF CODE OF CONDUCT ENQUIRIES**

The Committee has noted the nature of the Code of Conduct enquiries recorded by the Monitoring Officer since its last meeting in December. Members were reminded that the areas of the Code which appeared to cause the most concern formed the basis for the Monitoring Officer's approach towards the training of Parish Councils.

## **22. CODE OF CONDUCT TRAINING**

For training purposes, the Committee has discussed the content of a fact sheet issued by the Standards Board for England on "personal and prejudicial interests".

D L Hall  
Chairman