
Standards Committee

Report of the meeting held on 3rd December 2009

Matters for Information

11. MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEE

The Committee has noted the resignation of Mr M Reece as a Councillor of The Offords Parish Council and consequently as a parish council representative on the Standards Committee. The Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Association of Local Councils has been requested to nominate a replacement representative and it is the expectation that the Huntingdonshire Association will be meeting shortly to do so.

12. REPORTS OF SUB COMMITTEES

The Chairmen of the Referrals (Assessment) and Consideration & Hearing Sub Committees have updated the Committee on the business they have considered in general terms and reported on the outcome of each case.

In total five allegations of misconduct have been considered by the Assessment Sub Committee of which three have been referred to the Monitoring Officer for investigation. No further action was recommended in the other two cases.

Following an earlier investigation, the Consideration & Hearing Sub Committee has accepted a recommendation from the Investigating Officer that there was no breach of the Code of Conduct in cases involving complaints against two Councillors serving on Yaxley Parish Council.

13. 2009 ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

Further to Item No 5 of the Report of their meeting held on 23rd September 2009, the Committee received a report from those Members who attended the 2009 Annual Assembly of Standards Committees Conference held in Birmingham in October. Overall, attendance was considered to be worthwhile with participation in sessions with other local authorities particularly beneficial. Mention also was made of the tendency of other authorities to appoint specific Town/Parish Council Liaison Officers which, in the view of the Parish representatives present, potentially might offer some advantages in Huntingdonshire.

14. UPDATE ON CODE OF CONDUCT REVISION

The Department for Communities and Local Government is responsible for dealing with revisions to the Members Code of Conduct. It was the expectation that minor revisions to the current Code would be published last autumn. Disappointingly, a new Code has not yet been published but the Committee has noted that the main change is expected to involve the conduct of Members in their non-official capacity where that conduct would be a criminal offence. Further consultation on the introduction of a Code for Officers also is likely to take place in 2010. Training for District, town and parish Councillors will be arranged when the changes have been published.

15. LOG OF CODE OF CONDUCT ENQUIRIES

The Committee has noted the nature of the Code of Conduct enquiries recently recorded by the Monitoring Officer and has been reminded that the areas of the Code which appear to cause the most concern form the basis for the Monitoring Officer's approach to training for parish councils.

16. TRANSFER OF WORK FROM ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR ENGLAND INTO UNIFIED TRIBUNAL STRUCTURE

The Committee has been advised that the work of the Adjudication Panel (Standards for England) will transfer into the new General Regulatory Chamber (GRC) with effect from January 2010 and will, from that date be known as First Tier Tribunal (Local Government Standards, England). The Adjudication Panel will be abolished and references and appeals made formerly to the President of the Panel will now be determined by the First Tier Tribunal. These changes form part of a programme of tribunal reform and involve no additional staff at the tribunal offices in Leeds.

17. STANDARDS COMMITTEE – WEB STRATEGY

Following a meeting with the District Council's Web Development Team, several suggestions to improve the style and content of the Committee's current web pages and raise the profile of standards and code of conduct issues have been discussed. Initiatives include the introduction of an on line complaint form and a section featuring answers to frequently asked questions. In particular, the Committee has asked for an on site flow diagram which could act as a training aid when, for instance, seeking advice on whether or not it would be appropriate to declare interests. The Monitoring Officer also undertook to pursue other suggestions which comprised giving advice on how to pursue other forms of complaints and associated web links.

18. ASSESSMENT MADE CLEAR DVD

The Committee has viewed the latest training aid produced by Standards for England designed principally to help Members involved in the assessment of complaints.

D L Hall
Chairman