

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in the Aquarius Room, St. Ivo Leisure Centre, Westwood Road, St. Ives, PE27 6WU on Thursday, 3 December 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor T D Sanderson - Vice-Chairman

Councillors J D Ablewhite, Mrs B E Boddington,
P J Downes, R S Farrer, A Hansard,
T D Sanderson and G S E Thorpe.

Messrs J B Alexander, P L Boothman and
M Lynch.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Messrs D L Hall and G Watkins.

21. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3rd September 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Monitoring Officer announced that former Parish Councillor D MacPherson, who had been a Member of the Committee for many years, had passed away recently after a long illness. The Committee extended their condolences to Mr MacPherson's family.

22. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

23. MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEE

Having noted the resignation of Mr M Reece as Councillor of the Offords Parish Council and consequently as the Parish Council representative on the Committee, Members were informed that the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils had been requested to nominate a replacement representative and that it was the expectation that the Huntingdonshire Association would be meeting shortly to do so.

24. REPORT OF SUB-COMMITTEE

The Chairman of the Referrals (Assessment) Sub-Committee updated Members on the business considered by the Sub-Committee at meetings held on 6th October and 1st December 2009 and, in general terms, reported on the outcome of each case.

In the absence of the Chairman, the Monitoring Officer reported that the Consideration and Hearing Sub-Committee had 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.

25. 2009 ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

Further to Minute No. 9 of the meeting held on 9th July 2009, the Committee received a report from those Members who had attended the 2009 Annual Assembly of Standards Committees Conference held in Birmingham in October.

It was reported that, overall, attendance was considered to be worthwhile with participation in sessions with other local authorities particularly beneficial. Members also were reminded that the materials and presentations used at the conference were available to view and download from the Standards for England website.

Mention 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.

26. UPDATE ON CODE REVISION

The Committee were reminded that the Department for Communities and Local Government was responsible for dealing with revisions to the Members' Code of Conduct. The Monitoring Officer reported that it was the expectation that minor revisions to the current Code would be published in the Autumn. However, the Committee noted that a new Code had not yet been published but were reminded that the main change was expected to involve the conduct of Members in their non-official capacity where that conduct would be a criminal offence. The Monitoring Officer added that training for District, town and parish Councillors would be arranged when the changes to the Code had been published.

27. LOG OF CODE OF CONDUCT ENQUIRIES

The Committee received and noted the Code of Conduct enquiries which had been recorded by the Head of Law, Property and Governance and Monitoring Officer since the last meeting in September 2009 (an extract of the log is appended in the Minute Book).

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

A report by the Head of Law, Property and Governance and Monitoring Officer was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding the transfer of the work of the Adjudication Panel (Standards for England) into the new General Regulatory Chamber (GRC) with effect from January 2010. The Monitoring Officer reported that from this date, the GRC would be known as the First Tier Tribunal (Local Government Standards, England). Members further noted that the Adjudication Panel would be abolished and references and appeals made formerly to the President of the Panel would now be determined by the First Tier Tribunal. These changes formed part of a programme of tribunal reform and would involve no additional staff at the Tribunal Offices in Leeds. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the proposed changes to the Adjudication Panel for England be noted.

29. STANDARDS COMMITTEE - WEB STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Law, Property and Governance and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding a proposal to review the content of the "Standards and Conduct" pages on the District Council's website.

The Monitoring Officer reported that 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 had been discussed. Proposed initiatives included the introduction of an on-line complaint form and a section featuring answers to frequently asked questions. Having invited Members to comment on the proposed web strategy and make suggestions for additional initiatives that might be produced, Members suggested that it would be useful to create 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 an interest.

Although reminding the Committee that limited resources would dictate the extent of the development work proposed, 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.

30. ASSESSMENT MADE CLEAR DVD

The Committee viewed the latest training aid produced by Standards for England which was a DVD designed to help Members involved in the assessment of complaints. The Monitoring Officer responded to a series of questions on its conclusion.

31. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday 4th March 2010 at 4pm.

Chairman