

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in Room CVSO 1a, Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 3 March 2011.

PRESENT: Mr D L Hall - Chairman

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

Messrs J Alexander, P Boothman and M Lynch.

Mrs S Stafford.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor R S Farrer and Mr G Watkins.

36. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2nd December 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

38. REPORTS OF SUB-COMMITTEES

The Committee noted a report received from the Chairman of the Referrals (Assessment) Sub-Committee.

39. FUTURE OF THE LOCAL STANDARDS FRAMEWORK - UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 28 of the meeting held on 2nd December 2010 and by reference to a statement from the Department of Communities and Local Government and a summary of the Localism Bill as it related to standards (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book) the Committee was updated by the Monitoring Officer on the latest position in terms of the Government's intention to abolish the standards regime as first indicated in the Coalition Agreement published in May 2010. A copy of a bulletin issued by 'Standards In Public Life' entitled "Public Confidence in Local Government Standards is at Risk" by Sir Christopher Kelly also was circulated at the meeting.

Although "Standards for England" would cease to investigate complaints in late 2011 and be abolished formally in July 2012, the Department for Communities and Local Government had indicated that local authorities would be free to adopt their own code of conduct

after this date if they so wished.

The Committee was of the view that the adoption of a model code had raised the standard of conduct of Councillors generally and that it would be a retrograde step not to have a code which Members at all levels of local authority could undertake to abide by.

Members were fearful of the uncertainty and confusion that could arise should various tiers of authority adopt different codes. Therefore and having been made aware of the views of both the "Committee of Standards in Public Life" and the Local Government Association in this respect, the Committee, whilst welcoming the intention to make "Standards" Regulation more proportionate, concluded that a national code required to be retained to ensure that the confidence in the integrity of the behaviour of locally elected politicians would be maintained. Therefore, the Committee

RESOLVED

that, in recognition of the need for a measure of leadership and uniformity in ethical standards adopted by local authorities, the Council be recommended to request the Local Government Association to assume responsibility for formulating a model code of conduct to assist local authorities in responding to the proposed duty contained in the Decentralisation and Localism Bill.

40. MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEE

By way of a report by the Head of Law, Property and Governance and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Committee was reminded that the Council was required to appoint four independent Members and three town and parish council representatives to serve on the Committee in accordance with the Relevant Authorities (Standards Committee) Regulations 2001. Both independent Members and local council representatives were appointed to serve on the Committee for a four year period, the latest term of which was due to expire in May 2011.

Members were made aware that the Localism Bill appeared to suggest that local authorities could decide whether to establish Standards Committees to continue to consider complaints and misconduct and to monitor compliance with the locally approved Code of Conduct. With this in mind and until such time as the District Council takes a view on the future of the Committee and having received an indication from the current incumbents of their willingness to continue in posts for the time being, the Committee

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended to extend the period of office of all externally appointed Members and local council representatives until May 2012 or until such time as the District Council decides upon the future of the Committee whichever is the sooner.

41. CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE ON LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY

Further to Minute No. 30 of the meeting held on 2nd December 2010, the Monitoring Officer reported that, following consultation, a revised Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity had been laid before Parliament for approval. Members were reminded that the Code provided guidance on the content, style, distribution and cost of local authority publicity and was of particular importance during periods of heightened sensitivity in the run up to elections and referendums.

42. 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 the Monitoring Officer since the last meeting in December 2010 (an extract of the log is appended in the Minute Book).

43. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be held at 4pm on Thursday 7th July 2011.

Chairman