
Standards Committee

Report of the meetings held on 7th July and 8th September 2011

Matters for Information

1. APPOINTMENT AND REPORTS OF SUB COMMITTEES

The Committee has appointed the Sub-Committees required under the Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008 to undertake the initial assessment of allegations, to respond to any review of decisions requested by complainants and to hear cases referred for investigation. Each Sub-Committee is chaired by an independent Member.

The Chairmen of the Referrals (Assessment), Review and Consideration and Hearing Sub-Committees regularly update the Committee on the business they have dealt with in general terms and report on the outcome of each case.

Since the last report to Council, the Assessment Sub Committee has met to consider three complaints and of these two have been referred to the Monitoring Officer for investigation. No further action was recommended in the remaining case.

2. APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATIONS

Having regard to advice received from the Monitoring Officer, the Committee has approved applications for dispensation received from Colne, Great Gransden, Folksworth & Washingley, St Ives, St. Neots and Upwood and the Raveleys to allow Members of those Town and Parish Councils to discuss and vote on matters relating to community facilities in their parishes for a specified period.

The Committee again has expressed some unease at granting dispensations in a situation where all Members of a Town/Parish Council serve as Trustees to a community facility and has requested the Monitoring Officer to encourage those Parish Councils from whom applications have been submitted to explore ways to review their trustee arrangements so that people other than Councillors become Trustees.

Although a dispensation can be granted to a Councillor for a four year period, the Committee has, on this occasion approved all, but the application from St Ives, for a period ending May 2013 given the likelihood of changes to the standards regime in the interim and given the desire to urge those parish councils to amend their trustee

arrangements in the meantime. The dispensation granted to three Members of St Ives Town Council covered the remainder of an existing four year term which is due to expire in May 2012 in any event.

3. STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND – LATEST?

The Committee has noted the progress of the Localism Bill through Parliament taking a particular interest in those provisions of the Bill relating to 'standards'. As the Council previously had indicated its support for the formulation of a national Code of Conduct, the Committee was pleased to hear that a cross party group of peers were pursuing amendments to the Bill which could secure a national Code, to be issued through the Local Government Association, the retention of Standards Committees with an Independent Chairman and the removal of criminal sanctions for breaches of Members' interest provisions. It was the expectation that the House of Lords would take a view on these proposals shortly.

4. LOG OF CODE OF CONDUCT ENQUIRIES

The Committee has noted the nature of the Code of Conduct enquiries recorded by the Monitoring Officer over the period April to September

5. TRAINING UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer has reported that he has presented training on the code of conduct to Ramsey and St Neots Town Council and to newly elected District Councillors as part of their 'new Member induction'. Enquiries also have been made about the possibility of sessions for Huntingdon Town Council and for parishes in the north of the District hosted by Farcet Parish Council.

D L Hall
Chairman