

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in the Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 8 September 2011.

PRESENT: Mr D L Hall - Chairman
Councillors Mrs B E Boddington, R S Farrer, A Hansard and P G Mitchell.

Messrs J Alexander and M Lynch and Mrs S Stafford.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors K J Churchill, PJ Downes and T D Sanderson and Mr P Boothman.

11. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7th July 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor R S Farrer declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Minute No. 13 (a) by virtue of his connection with a case which had been considered by the Referrals (Assessment) Sub-Committee.

Councillors R S Farrer and A Hansard declared personal interests in Minute No. 15 by virtue of their membership of St. Neots Town Council.

13. REPORTS OF SUB-COMMITTEES

Mr M Lynch reported on the outcome of a case that had been considered by the Referrals (Assessment) Sub-Committee whilst he was still acting as Chairman. This case involved a Member serving on St. Neots Town Council. However, Mr Lynch considered it inappropriate to discuss the conclusion reached in the case of the Councillor on St. Ives Town Council because the Decision Notice had not yet been issued to the individual concerned.

It was noted that the Review and Consideration and Hearing Sub-Committees had not been required to meet during the period.

14. STANDARD FOR ENGLAND - LATEST?

By reference to a press release published by the Association of Council, Secretaries and Solicitors on 28th July 2011 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Monitoring Officer reported on the progress of the Localism Bill through Parliament and specifically

upon 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.

Members remained of the view that whilst there had been concerns about the current procedures for the assessment and determination of complaints, the public would expect there to be a mechanism through which less serious complaints could be reviewed.

As it was the expectation that the House of Lords would take a view on these proposals shortly, the Monitoring Officer undertook to advise the Committee of any developments as they emerged. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the content of the press release published by the Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors be noted.

15. APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATION

Having regard to a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Committee considered applications received for dispensation from Colne, Great Gransden, Folksworth and Washingley, St. Neots and Upwood and The Raveleys Town & Parish Councils. Each application had been submitted because previous dispensations had expired on 30th April - the end of the terms of office of the respective Councils.

Members were reminded that, in these cases, dispensation was requested to allow Members of the Town and Parish Councils concerned to discuss and vote on matters relating to community facilities in their parish for a specified period.

The Committee again expressed some unease at granting dispensations in situations where all Members of a Town/Parish Council served as Trustees to a community facility and requested the Monitoring Officer to encourage those Parish Councils from whom applications had been submitted to explore ways to review their Trustee arrangements so that people other than Councillors became Trustees. Given the likelihood of changes to the standards regime and their desire to urge Parish Councils to amend their trustee arrangements in the meantime, the Committee considered whether it would be appropriate to grant dispensations for a two-year rather than four-year period. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

(a) that a dispensation be granted to the current Members

of Colne Parish Council to speak and vote on matters relating to the village hall and playing fields in Colne for the period ending 30th April 2013;

- (b) that a dispensation be granted to the current Members of Great Gransden Parish Council to speak and vote on matters relating to Great Gransden Reading Room and Public Recreation Ground for a period ending 30th April 2013;
- (c) that a dispensation be granted to the current Members of Folksworth and Washingley Parish Council to speak and vote on matters relating to the Village Hall for a period ending 30th April 2013;
- (d) that a dispensation be granted to the current Members of St. Neots Town Council to speak and vote on matters relating to St. Neots Outdoor Swimming Pool and Ackerman Street Playing Field, Eaton Socon for a period ending 30th April 2013; and
- (e) that dispensation be granted to the current Members of Upwood and The Raveleys Parish Council to speak and vote on matters relating to the Charities associated with allotments for the poor in the Parish for a period ending April 2013.

16. LOG OF CODE OF CONDUCT ENQUIRIES

The Committee received and noted the Code of Conduct enquiries which had been recorded by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Monitoring Officer since the last meeting in July (an extract of the log is appended in the Minute Book).

17. TRAINING UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer reported that, since the last meeting, he had presented training on the Code of Conduct to St. Neots Town Council and that enquiries had been made about the possibility of sessions for Huntingdon Town Council and for several parishes in the north of the District hosted by Farcet Parish Council.

18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held at 4pm on Thursday 1st December 2011.

Chairman