

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, 26 June 2014.

PRESENT: Councillor A Hansard - Chairman
Councillors Mrs B E Boddington,
Mrs L A Duffy and G J Harlock.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P McCloskey and Mrs D Townsend.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors K M Baker, S M Van De Kerkhove, T D Sanderson and P K Ursell.

(The Deputy Independent Person, Mr P Baker attended the meeting as an observer.)

4. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6th March and 4th June 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Mrs L Duffy declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in Minute No. 8 as she had an acquaintance with an individual involved in the Code of Conduct case which had arisen at Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.

6. STANDARDS - UPDATE

By way of 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 was informed of the response by the Council and the Corporate Governance Panel to the series of recommendations made at the last meeting in respect of changes to the Code of Conduct, membership of the Committee and its terms of reference. The Committee also was apprised of the nature and action taken in response to complaints recently received by the Monitoring Officer and, although very early in the process, the position thus far in respect of the adoption of the new HDC Code by Parish Councils and the return of disclosable pecuniary interest forms made necessary by the adoption of a new Code. In respect of the latter, a schedule reflecting the current position was circulated at the meeting and a copy also is appended in the Minute Book.

Since adoption of a new Code by the Council, the Committee noted that the Monitoring Officer had –

- ◆ issued a new Code of Conduct and advised all Parish

- Councils who previously had adopted the HDC Code to adopt the new Code of Conduct at its first available meeting in the new Municipal Year;
- ◆ revised the 'declaration of interest' form to include the new category of "non-statutory disclosable interests" relating to bodies exercising functions of a public nature, those directed towards charitable purposes and those whose principal purpose included the influence of public opinion or policy;
 - ◆ issued revised forms to all District and relevant Parish Councils to complete; and
 - ◆ updated the briefing note for Members and 'Frequently Asked Questions' advice and included this on the updated "Standards and Conduct" pages on the District Council's website.

Given the value of continuity, Members were pleased to note that the Independent Members and Council representatives would continue to serve on the Committee until 30th April 2016. The Committee also looked forward to managing its extended workload which now would include complaints and matters relating to elections.

Having acknowledged that Colin Meadowcroft, the current Monitoring Officer would shortly be leaving the District Council's service, the Committee noted that given the recent changes to the Council's senior officer structure and ongoing discussions on the potential for legal services to be shared with other authorities, it was still uncertain which Officer would undertake the role of Monitoring Officer in the future. As this position was likely to be resolved by September, the Committee

RESOLVED

that the report now submitted be received and noted.

7. REQUEST FOR DISPENSATION

A report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) attached to which was a copy of an application received from Councillor Mrs P A Jordan requesting that a dispensation be granted with immediate effect to enable her to speak and vote at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) when business relating to the work of the NHS, her employer, arose at Panel meetings.

Members were reminded of the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 in relation to dispensation and in particular the content of Section 31(4) of the Act which indicates that a Member with a 'Disclosable Pecuniary Interest' may not participate in discussion nor vote on a matter at a meeting unless dispensation had been granted to enable that Member to do so.

After careful consideration, the Committee

RESOLVED

that a dispensation be granted to Councillor Mrs P A Jordan for the remainder of her term of office to 30th April 2015 to speak and vote on matters coming before the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) connected with NHS issues other than those affecting her own personal terms and conditions of employment and matters associated with NHS Community Services which impact upon her directly as an employee.

8. STANDARDS CASES

For information and partly for training purposes, the Committee noted the outcome and methodology used in the three cases involving alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct which had occurred in various authorities nationwide (a copy of the cases referred to are appended in the Minute Book).

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on Thursday 11th September 2014 at 4.00pm in the Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon.

10. COLIN MEADOWCROFT, HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND MONITORING OFFICER

Having been made aware that this was the last meeting at which Colin Meadowcroft would be acting as the Committee's advisor and Monitoring Officer, Members took the opportunity to extend their appreciation to him for his help and support to them and for his contribution to maintaining and monitoring ethical standards over recent years.

Chairman