

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in the Civic Suite 0.1B, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 8 December 2015.

PRESENT: Councillor K M Baker – Vice-Chairman in the Chair

Councillors Mrs L A Duffy, D A Giles and J E White and Mr P McClosky

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs B E Boddington, A Hansard, R Harrison and M F Shellens

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Baker, Mrs G Holmes and Mrs D Townsend

27. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10th September 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

28. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

29. THE CODE OF CONDUCT AND THE REGISTER OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

By means of a report by the Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee was updated on the adoption of a Code of Conduct by Town and Parish Councils and the receipt and publication of register of interests forms on behalf of District and Town and Parish Councillors. Members were reminded that the Monitoring Officer had a duty to establish and maintain a register of disclosable pecuniary interests. They noted that all of the 71 Town and Parish Councils had adopted a Code of Conduct, with 56 based on that adopted by the District Council, 11 had opted for the Code promoted by the National Association of Local Councils and the remaining four Councils had adopted their own version of the Code. They were of the view that this represented a considerable improvement on the position a year ago.

Members were then informed that, of the 71 Town and Parish Councils, 61 had their full Register published, which comprised the Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI) forms of all Councillors. Clerks from the remaining 10 Parish Councils had been reminded to send in outstanding DPI forms as soon as possible.

In terms of individual DPIs, 592 of a total of 650 had been received

from Parish Councillors, 22 were outstanding and 36 were vacancies. The forms of all District Councillors had been published.

The Committee considered how to ensure the outstanding DPIs were received. Given the improvement in return rates, it was considered that the Monitoring Officer should write directly to parish Councillors who had not returned DPIs before more proactive measures were considered. It also was suggested that the documentation Councillors received after they had been elected should be reviewed to ensure it made clear what their responsibilities were in this respect.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

30. ELECTION FREQUENCY

The Committee gave consideration to a report by the Managing Director (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing the responses submitted during consultation of the Council's election frequency. Members were reminded that the consultation had been undertaken as part of the review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) of the Council's electoral arrangements.

Members noted that, in total, 75 responses have been received. Opinion was equally split on whether to keep to annual elections or change to holding elections every four years.

Mrs D Townsend commented that, in the absence of more detailed information and of the financial implications, it was difficult for town and parish councils to form a view. Financial information was needed as they were planning their budgets.

Members recognised there were strong arguments to support either method of selecting Councillors. Their attention was drawn to the fact that the Council had submitted a proposal to the LGBCE to continue with 52 Councillors and that the LGBCE usually expected Councils that held elections every year to have a number of councillors, which was divisible by three so there was an election in every multi-member ward every year. However, on the grounds that it promoted continuity in the Membership, the Committee;

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended not to resolve to move to all-out elections, thus retaining a pattern of electing by thirds.

31. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on 3rd March 2016 in the Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon.

Chairman