

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Agenda item 2

2 March 2007

Present: Mrs P. Hudson-Bendersky (in the chair)
Mr S.Lainé (Vice-Chair), Mr J. Leamon, Mr J. Cripps
Parish Councillor S Fowler
Councillors Tina Franklin and Robin MacDonald.

Apologies: None

Also in attendance:

(4.30 – 6.00 pm)

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2006 be approved and signed as a true record.

2. MATTERS ARISING

Page 1, item 2 - the Chairman asked if there had been any progress in setting up standards training for parish councils. The monitoring officer advised that he was setting up a joint county training event in June to introduce the new code of conduct and all parish councils would be invited to attend.

MO

Page 2, item 3 – the Democratic services manager agreed to circulate a schedule of parish council meetings for 2007 as soon as possible.

DSM

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Franklin declared an interest in agenda Item 14.

3. MEMBERS REPORTS ON ATTENDANCES AT COUNCIL, COMMITTEE AND PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS AND OTHER MEETINGS

Mr Lainé advised that he and Mr Leamon and Mr Cripps had all attended the South West independent members of standards committee conference earlier that day in Bristol. Among the issues discussed had been how to raise the profile of the standards committees and good practice for dealing with complaints. Members were advised that the average cost of a hearing including back-office support was in the order of £10,000 and could take up a considerable amount of member time. For these reasons standards committees were advised to do whatever they could to get an early resolution of a complaint to avoid it having to go to a full hearing. The importance of good documentation was also stressed.

The Chairman advised members that the Standards board for England was organising a series of roadshows on the revised code of conduct. Local venues were at Swindon on the 26th of June and Birmingham on the 14th of June and she asked

To be approved at the next meeting of the Standards Committee on 13 July 2007

members to advise the monitoring officer which event they could attend within the next two weeks. ***ALL MEMBERS***

4. UPDATE ON LATEST BULLETINS, CASES AND COMPLAINTS

The customer relations officer updated the committee on the recent summary of customer feedback circulated with the agenda. She highlighted the success of the recent session with the ombudsman and said she had received very positive comments from attendees. She advised that the volume of work had increased particularly with the introduction of the Freedom of information act and 35 FOI requests had been received in the third quarter 2006/07.

At the request of the Chairman the customer relations officer circulated two files relating to complaints for the committee to see how complaints were processed.

5. ANNUAL REPORT

The draft annual report circulated with the agenda was agreed and the chairman advised that she would be attending council on the 26th of March 2007 to present the report.

RESOLVED

The annual report of the standards committee be approved for reporting to Council on the 26th of March 2007.

DSM

6. CONSULTATION ON AMENDMENTS TO THE MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY MEMBERS

The Monitoring Officer highlighted the proposed changes to the code of conduct and invited members to make any amendments or additions to the draft response he had circulated with the agenda. In his view he felt it was important to place on record their concerns about the shortness of the consultation period and the number of basic errors in the document. There was a shortage of guidance in the code and more clarity and definition was needed and significant improvement in some areas before it could be implemented. He also highlighted the potential legal difficulties in implementing a code when the supporting legislation would not be implemented before 2008.

In response to a request from the chairman, the monitoring officer agreed to circulate the draft to all elected members for comment.

RESOLVED

The monitoring officer is instructed to respond to the consultation document as set out in his report and taking into account any additional comments from other members.

MO

7. RECRUITMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

The chairman advised members that she would be stepping down from the committee in July and that Mr Cripps four years term of office expired in October although he would be eligible to reapply. A number of options were suggested for recruitment including an advertisement in local papers and invitations to apply to school

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governors, the University, local libraries, the police authority and attendees of the recent standards committee forum. ***MO***

8. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

The Democratic services manager updated members on the work of the independent remuneration panel and invited the committee to make comments to the panel on payment of allowances to independent members. The committee agreed that the chairman of the standards committee should receive a special responsibility allowance and they also felt that a payment should be made to independent members. They felt this would encourage more people to apply for the role. Although they understood that legislation prevented members allowances be based on attendance they did feel there was a need to recognise that members of the standards committee may be required to spend a significant amount of time on hearings in addition to the regular committee meetings. They asked if there was any way that a payment could be made for attending hearings which extended to half a day or more.

The monitoring officer agreed to feedback these comments to the panel. ***MO***

9. REVIEW OF PROGRESS AGAINST WORK PLAN

The monitoring officer gave a verbal update of progress against the work plan. Due to the pressure of other work he had been unable to make any progress on the officer code of conduct and the mayor's protocol and he agreed to bring back a revised plan to the next meeting. ***MO***

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next ordinary meeting of the Committee will be on 13 July 2007.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The chairman advised that the annual assembly would be in October and asked the monitoring officer to book 2 places, one for parish councillor Fowler and one for the new member. ***MO***

12. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED: that in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the next item of business as it is likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, if members of the public are present there will be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in paragraph 1, Part 1, Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Local Government Act 1972, namely:-

Paragraph 1

Information relating to any individual

13. EXEMPT MINUTES

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RESOLVED that the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2006 be approved and signed as a true record.

MRS P. HUDSON-BENDERSKY
Chairman