

DRAFT MINUTES SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT NEXT MEETING ON 23rd OCTOBER 2006

Draft Minutes of the Standards Committee Meeting held on Monday 24th July 2006 in Committee Rooms C & D, Level -1, Council Offices, Monkton Park, Chippenham, commencing at 7.00pm

Present:

Independent Members: Mr B. Philpott Chairman
Mr J. Carine Vice-Chairman

Parish/Town Council Representatives: Councillors J. R. Scragg and G. Yates

Officers: H. Braid (Policy & Democratic Services Officer), P. Jeremiah (Legal Services Team Leader & Monitoring Officer) and J. Tavener (Customer Services Team Leader).

ST1. Election of Chairman

The Monitoring Officer called for nominations for the position of Chairman of the Standards Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year.

Mr J. Carine proposed and Councillor G. Yates seconded that Mr R. Philpott be elected Chairman for the ensuing Municipal Year.

Resolved that Mr R. Philpott be appointed Chairman of the Standards Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year.

Note: Mr R Philpott in the Chair.

ST2. Appointment of Vice Chairman

The Chairman called for nominations for the position of Vice-Chairman of the Standards Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year.

Councillor J. R. Scragg proposed and Councillor G. Yates seconded that Mr J. Carine be elected Vice-Chairman of the Standards Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year.

Resolved that Mr J. Carine be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Standards Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year.

ST3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors P. J. Goldstone and J. R. Ireland.



ST4. Public Question Time / Receipt of Petitions

None.

ST5. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 18th April 2006 were considered.

Resolved that the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 18th April 2006 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

ST6. Chairman's Announcements

None.

ST7. Declarations of Interests

None.

ST8. Comments and Complaints Policy and Procedure

Consideration was given to Report No. 8 (circulated with the agenda) which provided an overview of how the Council deals with comments and complaints. The report also provided information on the number of comments and complaints received by service areas for each financial year commencing April 2004.

Issues discussed during consideration of this item included:

- The history of the Council's approach to Comments & Complaints.
- The inadequacies of the previous system which did not enable the easy extraction of management information.
- A system specification for the database has now been developed and it is anticipated that a roll-out of the new process will take place in October 2006.
- Training will be provided to Officers in respect of the new process.
- The publicity associated with the process to make a complaint about an elected Member.
- Possible confusion that may arise to the public about the role of the Local Government Ombudsman and the Standards Board for England.

Resolved that

- (1) The report be noted.
- (2) That a report be presented to the next meeting of the Standards Committee regarding the

information available to the public in respect of complaints against elected Members.

ST9. Standards Committee Hearing

The Ethical Standards Officer has referred two complaints to the Monitoring Officer for investigation and determination under S.58 of the Local Government Act 2000. The two complaints are listed as SBE.14558.06 and SBE.14559.06. Both complaints are in respect of the same issue and concern a Parish Council.

At its meeting on 11th September 2003, the Standards Committee agreed that hearings will take place in front of 3 Members of the Committee. These Members to be selected on the basis of availability and must include an independent Member and a town or parish Member.

The Committee was asked to agree 3 Members to determine these complaints.

Resolved that

- (1) Mr R. Philpott and Councillor G. Yates be appointed to determine complaints SBE.14558.06 and SBE.14559.06.
- (2) Authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer to appoint a District Council Member of the Standards Committee to determine complaints SBE.14558.06 and SBE.14559.06.

ST10. The Code of Conduct – Training for Members

Consideration was given to Report No.10 (circulated with the agenda) seeking the views of the Committee upon proposals in respect of training for District, Town and Parish Councillors on the Code of Conduct for Members.

Issues discussed during consideration of this item included:

- Training will be required following the district wide elections in May 2007, which may coincide with changes to the Code.
- The future of Area Committees is currently under review.
- It would be helpful if reference could be made to planning issues, especially those being dealt with at small parish councils where declarations of interest are of concern.

Resolved that training in respect of the Code of Conduct be carried out as follows:

- (1) District Councillors will be provided with a copy of the Code of Conduct as part of their induction pack.
- (2) Training will be provided to District and Parish / Town Councillors at Area Committee meetings.

- (3) If there are no Area Committees then the District Councillors will be trained at Monkton Park and the Parish / Town Councillors will be trained at five venues to be arranged.

ST11. Monitoring Officers & Independent Members' Forum – Oxfordshire, Berkshire & Wiltshire

Consideration was given to Report No.11 (circulated with the agenda) which provided feedback from Mr J Carine following his attendance at the Monitoring Officers' and Independent Members' Forum on 21st April 2006.

Issues discussed during consideration of this item included:

- Concern that the role of the Independent Member was becoming an industry in itself with the creation of various Forums.
- How it will be possible to establish whether Standards Committees are under-performing.
- The likelihood of additional work for Members and Officers when it becomes the duty of Local Authorities to undertake investigations.
- A system to deal with investigations will need to be established.
- That consideration will be given to appointing an additional Independent Member when the position is next advertised.

Resolved that the report be noted.

ST12. Standards Board for England – Consultation Exercise

Feedback was received from Mr B Philpott in respect of an interview undertaken with BMG Research (on behalf of the Standards Board for England) seeking views upon the future direction of the Standards Regime.

Issues discussed during consideration of this item included:

- The questions asked by the researcher were just for the general views of the Chairman as to how the work of the Standards Board was viewed by Standards Committee members and other elected Members.
- It is not known when and how feedback from the research will be made available.

Resolved that the feedback be noted.

ST13. Standards Board for England – Bulletin 29

Consideration was given to the Standards Board for England - Bulletin 29 (circulated with the agenda).

Issues considered during consideration of this item included:

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- The quality of the Bulletin has improved greatly since it was launched.
- The Standards Committee covers all of the issues required by the Local Government Act 2000.
- The terms of reference for the Standards Committee do not conflict with those of the Audit & Final Accounts Committee.

Resolved that the Standards Board for England - Bulletin 29 be noted.

The meeting started at 7.00pm and concluded at 7.40pm.

There were no members of the public present.