

Standards Committee

Tuesday, 15 November 2005

Present: Mr Ellwood (Chair), Councillor Dennis Edgerley (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Thomas Bedford, Thomas McGowan, Mrs Stella Walsh, Rev Cree and Mrs Geddes

05.S.31 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

Councillor Bedford declared an interest in Item 9: The number of any allegations referred back to the Monitoring Officer where there is no further action to be taken.

05.S.32 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

- 1. That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 25 April 2005 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**
- 2. The Monitoring Officer to draft a report recommending that the Scheme of Members Allowances be amended to state that if a Member of the Council was suspended the allowance received would be stopped for the period of the suspension.**
- 3. That training for Members of the Council on Standards issues be provided in-house in the New Year. Training for Parish Councillors would be provided jointly with LPTC.**

05.S.33 LOCAL INVESTIGATIONS

The Committee received a booklet from the Standards Board for England entitled "How to conduct an Investigation – advice for local authorities on investigating allegations of misconduct".

The Monitoring Officer highlighted that she could be conflicted out from undertaking an investigation if she had given any advice relating to the allegations in question. In this instance another person would be required to carry out the investigation. This was a national issue with budget implications, as an external person might have to be bought in. The Monitoring Officer would raise this at the next meeting of Monitoring Officers and report back any helpful information.

The Committee noted that an Ethical Standards Officer held stronger powers in relation to the provision of information from witnesses than a Monitoring Officer. It was noted that in the event of any difficulties in this area the matter would be referred back to the Standards Board for England.

RESOLVED – That the booklet "How to conduct an Investigation – advice for local authorities on investigating allegations of misconduct" be noted.

05.S.34 UPDATE FROM THE STANDARDS BOARD CONFERENCE

The Committee received an update from the Standards Board Conference from the Deputy Director of Legal Services.

It was hoped that in the future at an earlier stage further action could be taken at the local level rather than complaints being reported straight to London. The grievance procedure would be developed further in the future.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

05.S.35 REVISION OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

The Committee received a paper entitled "The Standards Board for England's consultation on the review of the Code of Conduct - recommendations to Ministers". The report summed up the conclusions of the Standards Board for England on how the Code of Conduct should be amended.

The Committee discussed the paper and noted that the aim of the review had been to simplify, clarify and liberalize the Code whilst remaining true to the underlying principles of the Code. The issue of prejudicial interests and the importance of the Code of Conduct at Parish Council level were discussed.

Ministers would consider the paper and the result of the revision would be known in early 2006. An update on the revision of the Code of Conduct would be presented to the next meeting of the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED – That the paper and update be noted.

05.S.36 UPDATE FROM THE STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE

Members of the Standards Sub-Committee reported that the Register of Members Interests under the Code of Conduct for Parish Councillors for all 23 Parish Councils had been examined at their recent meeting. Several of the entries had required the attention of the Monitoring Officer and would be followed up in accordance with the policy drawn up by Legal Services.

The Committee noted that the forms used to complete the Register of Members Interests were not written in plain English. The vast majority of Parish Council Clerks had been helpful throughout the exercise. Each of the 23 Parish Councils would receive a Register of Gifts and Hospitality from the Borough Council for use by their Parish Councillors. The printing section would create this in house.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

05.S.37 THE NUMBER OF ANY ALLEGATIONS REFERRED TO THE STANDARDS BOARD SINCE THE LAST MEETING

None.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

05.S.38 THE NUMBER OF ANY ALLEGATIONS REFERRED BACK TO THE MONITORING OFFICER WHERE THERE IS NO FURTHER ACTION TO BE TAKEN.

Councillor Bedford declared a prejudicial interest in the following item and left the room for the duration of the item.

Three

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

05.S.39 BRIEF RESUME OF DETAILS REGARDING ANY ALLEGATIONS REFERRED BACK TO THE MONITORING OFFICER WHERE ACTION IS TO BE TAKEN EITHER BY THE COMMITTEE OR MATTERS BEING REFERRED TO THE ADJUDICATION PANEL.

None

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

Chair