

Standards Committee

Friday, 11 May 2007

Present: Mr Ellwood (Independent Chair) and Councillors Alan Gain, Thomas McGowan and Mrs Joan Geddes (Parish Council representative)

Officers in attendance: Andrew Docherty (Director of Customer, Democratic and Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)) and Ruth Hawes (Assistant Democratic Services Officer)

07.S.14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Keith Iddon and Rev. John Cree.

07.S.15 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest by Members relating to the items on the agenda.

07.S.16 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 7 March 2007 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

07.S.17 REVISED CODE OF CONDUCT

The Standards Committee considered the newly published “The Code of Conduct, Guidance for Members”. The Council at the Annual Meeting to be held on 15 May was scheduled to adopt the revised Code of Conduct.

The guidance highlighted the importance of the Code being adopted in its model form, without amendment. This would give certainty to members and the public as to what standards were expected and ensure consistency throughout local authorities, avoiding confusion for members on more than one authority and for the public. This minimises the legal risk of the authority adopting additional provisions that are unenforceable.

The Committee noted that the Standards Board for England has recommended that the authority includes a preamble to the Code that it adopts, which outlines the ten general principles governing the conduct of members of local authorities. These are set out in the *Relevant Authorities (General Principles) Order 2001*. and are based on the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

These principles define the standards that members should uphold, and serve as a reminder of the purpose of the Code of Conduct. As these principles do not create a statutory obligation for members, the Standards Board cannot accept allegations that they have been breached. However, Members should be aware that a failure to act in accordance with these general principles could amount to a breach of the Code of Conduct.

The Ten General Principles of Public Life are set out below:

Selflessness – members should serve only the public interest and should never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person.

Honesty and integrity – members should not place themselves in situations where their honesty and integrity may be questioned, should not behave improperly, and should on all occasions avoid the appearance of such behaviour.

Objectivity – members should make decisions on merit, including when making appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards or benefits.

Accountability – members should be accountable to the public for their actions and the manner in which they carry out their responsibilities, and should co-operate fully and honestly with any scrutiny appropriate to their particular office.

Openness – members should be as open as possible about their actions and those of their authority, and should be prepared to give reasons for those actions.

Personal judgement – members may take account of the views of others, including their political groups, but should reach their own conclusions on the issues before them and act in accordance with those conclusions.

Respect for others – members should promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person, and by treating people with respect, regardless of their race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability. They should respect the impartiality and integrity of the authority's statutory officers and its other employees.

Duty to uphold the law – members should uphold the law and, on all occasions, act in accordance with the trust that the public is entitled to place in them.

Stewardship – members should do whatever they are able to do to ensure that their authorities use their resources prudently, and in accordance with the law.

Leadership – members should promote and support these principles by leadership, and by example, and should act in a way that secures or preserves public confidence.

All Members would need to complete a new registration form as there are some additional requirements in the new Code as well as some changes of wording. All Members would receive a copy of the form at the Annual Council and it would be available on the loop.

The Committee considered options for the delivery of information and training to Parish Councils. This would be discussed at the meeting of Borough/Parish Liaison on 18 July. Informal discussions have taken place about a buddy scheme with members of the Standards Committee. It was important that there was two-way dialogue between the Borough Council and the Parishes.

An event would be held on 9 July hosted by Lancashire County Council at the Woodlands Conference Centre. The event aimed to share experiences and formulating ideas for joint working and support on a range of standards issues. The revised Code and preparations for the local filtering of complaints from next year would also be considered.

RESOLVED - That:

- 1. The Council be recommended to adopt the revised model code of conduct without amendment,**
- 2. The Ten General Principles of Public Life are set out as a preamble to the code and**
- 3. All Members complete and return their Register of Interests form to Democratic Services within 28 days,**
- 4. A letter be sent to all Parish Council clerks highlighting the guidance on the revised code available from the Standards Board for England and enclosing a copy of the Register on Interests form for use by Parish Councillors,**
- 5. That the Democratic Services officer write to all Members of the Standards Committee after the Annual Meeting with details of the event at Woodlands on 9 July.**

07.S.18 THE NUMBER OF ANY ALLEGATIONS REFERRED TO THE STANDARDS BOARD SINCE THE LAST MEETING

None.

07.S.19 THE NUMBER OF ANY ALLEGATIONS REFERRED BACK TO THE MONITORING OFFICER WHERE THERE IS NO FURTHER ACTION TO BE TAKEN.

None.

07.S.20 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.

One.

Chair