

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held on Wednesday, 11 February, 2009 at 6.00 p.m. at Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors R. Aveley, V.A. Fletcher, C.R.P. Mollett, H. Rhodes, K.S. Sahota and A.G.P. Williams
B. Bayley and F. Beasland (Independent Members)
Councillors D. Edwards and R. Williams (Parish Council representatives)

ST-26 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Head of Legal Services reported that the Chairman, Mr Simpson, was unable to attend, and it was therefore necessary to elect a Chairman for the meeting. In accordance with the statutory requirements, the Chairman had to be an Independent Member of the Committee. It was moved, seconded and

RESOLVED – that Mr F Beasland be elected Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

ST-27 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 18 December 2008 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

ST-28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mr A. Simpson (Independent Member – Chairman), Councillors U.E. Sambrook and A.J. Stanton, and Councillor R. Wickson (Parish Council representative)

ST-29 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor K.S. Sahota declared a personal and prejudicial interest (in relation to his position as Chairman of Great Dawley Parish Council) in agenda item 5 – Code of Conduct Complaints Quarterly Update – and agenda item 6 – Report on action taken by the Monitoring Officer.

ST-30 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT TRAINING UPDATE

The Head of Legal Services presented a report which, further to Minute ST-23 at the last meeting, provided further options for the Code of Conduct training programme for the next municipal year.

At the last meeting, Members expressed disappointment with the Code of Conduct training provided in November 2008, and asked for a report on how training could be improved in the future. Taking account of the comments received, it was proposed that future training could be more interactive by

adopting a workshop style approach, and reducing the numbers attending each session. This would entail more training sessions, but would allow the opportunity to spread the training to afternoon and evening sessions on a number of days. It was also suggested that training could be provided at various venues around the Borough and not solely limited to Civic Offices, in order to encourage more Parish Councillors to attend. The training could also be tailored to the aspects of the Code which Members found most challenging.

Members were strongly in favour of the proposal to hold training events at different venues in the Borough as a way of encouraging a higher attendance rate. Emphasis was also placed on ensuring that the training was of a high quality. It was suggested that it would be better value for the training to be delivered in-house, to which the Head of Legal Services advised that this was dependent on other work pressures/priorities, and so a flexible approach to the delivery of training was recommended. Other suggestions included targeting training at Parish and Town Clerks, so they were better equipped to advise newly elected/co-opted members. This could be promoted through the local Parish Forum or Wrekin Area Committee of Parish & Town Councils. Reference was made to the training DVD that the Standards Board for England had produced, and the Head of Legal Services advised that he would investigate whether it could be put on the Council's website, for downloading by Parish Members/Clerks.

In relation to a question about making training on the Code of Conduct mandatory, the Head of Legal Services stated that, despite pressure to do so, there was no indication that the Government or Standards Board were looking to introduce such a requirement.

The Head of Legal Services added that a further report to the next meeting of the Committee would provide specific details of the training programme for the remainder of the year.

RESOLVED – that the proposals outlined in the report, along with the suggestions raised at the meeting, be approved as the basis for the arrangements for the Code of Conduct training programme for the 2009/10 municipal year.

ST-31 **CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS MADE TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE - QUARTERLY UPDATE: 1ST OCTOBER TO 31ST DECEMBER 2008.**

Councillor Sahota withdrew during consideration of this item.

The Head of Legal Services presented a report which detailed the Code of Conduct complaints received by the Standards Committee during the period 1 October 2008 to 31 December 2008.

During that period, the Standards Committee received four Code of Conduct complaints under the new system for local assessment. The complaints

related to both Borough and Parish Councillors, and had been considered by the Referrals Sub-Committee on 15 December 2008. The Sub-Committee decided that no further action was to be taken in respect of three of the four elected members. In the case of the other Member, a direction was made to the Monitoring Officer to invite that Elected Member to attend Code of Conduct training. It was expected that a review would be requested in respect of at least one of the decisions to take no further action. A quarterly return had been forwarded to the Standards Board for England.

RESOLVED – that the contents of the report be noted.

ST-32 REPORT ON ACTION UNDERTAKEN BY THE MONITORING OFFICER FOLLOWING A CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINT – COUNCILLOR NICOLA HOLMES

Councillor Sahota withdrew during consideration of this item.

The Head of Legal Services presented a report which updated the Committee on the action undertaken at the direction of the Referrals Sub-Committee following a complaint alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct.

On 15 December 2008, the Referrals Sub-Committee had met to consider a complaint made by a member of the public alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct by a number of Borough and Parish Councillors. The Sub-Committee decided that, in respect of the complaint against Councillor Nicola Holmes of Great Dawley Parish Council, they would direct the Monitoring Officer to invite that Elected Member to attend Code of Conduct training. The training took place on 28 January 2009, and included viewing the Standards Board training DVD and particular emphasis on personal and prejudicial interests. The Councillor was also provided with relevant Standards Board for England fact sheets.

RESOLVED – that the outcome of the action undertaken by the Monitoring Officer following the decision of the Referrals Sub-Committee on 15 December 2008 be confirmed as satisfactory.

The meeting ended at 6.38 pm

Chairman:

Date: