

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held on Wednesday, 21 September, 2011 at 6.00 p.m. at Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors C.B.A. Elliott and R.J. Sloan;
Mr F. Beasland and Mr A. Selvaratnam (Chair) (Independent Members);
Councillors P. Fairclough and R. Wickson (Parish Council representatives)

ST-7 MINUTES

In relation to Minute ST-6(c) regarding consultation on the future ethical framework in Telford & Wrekin, the Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer reported that the Localism Bill was still being debated in the House of Lords, where a number of amendments had been submitted. Some of these were seeking to retain elements of the current Code of Conduct and standards framework, so there was still some uncertainty as to the final shape of the Bill. Therefore, it was not proposed to seek views from Borough and Parish/Town Councillors until the position was clearer.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 16 June 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

ST-8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors S. Davies, T.J. Hope, M.B. Hosken, A.D. McClements and A.J. Stanton
Councillors D. Edwards and R. Williams (Parish Council representatives)

ST-9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

ST-10 REPORT ON ACTION UNDERTAKEN BY THE MONITORING OFFICER FOLLOWING A CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINT – COUNCILLOR ADRIAN MEREDITH

The Legal Services Manager presented a report of the Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer 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 16th June 2011 the Standards Referrals Sub-Committee considered a complaint made by a member of the public alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct by Councillor Adrian Meredith. While making no finding on whether the Code had been breached, the Sub-Committee decided to direct the Monitoring Officer to provide training to Councillor Meredith. A copy of the public summary was appended to the report for information.

On 18th July 2011, Councillor Meredith met with the Monitoring Officer and one of the Deputy Monitoring Officers to discuss sections of the Code that were the subject of the complaint along with other issues that particularly related to the planning process. Following that meeting, the Monitoring Officer was satisfied that the areas of the Code that the Sub-Committee asked to be covered in the training had been addressed, and that the appropriate training/discussions had taken place.

The Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer added that a further complaint against Councillor Meredith had been received from the same member of the public. However, this did not raise any new issues in terms of the Code of Conduct or this Committee's remit.

RESOLVED – that the Committee is satisfied with the outcome of the action undertaken by the Monitoring Officer following the decision of the Referrals Sub-Committee on 16th June.

ST-11 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED – that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it may involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

**ST-12 REPORT FROM AN ETHICAL STANDARDS OFFICER
CONCERNING THE CONDUCT OF A FORMER COUNCILLOR**

The Legal Services Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer presented a report concerning an investigation by an Ethical Standards Officer into the conduct of Denis Allen, a former Borough and Town Councillor.

The Referrals Sub-Committee met on 2 March 2011 to assess a complaint submitted jointly from the then Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer concerning the conduct of Councillor Allen. The Sub-Committee decided to refer the complaint to Standards for England, who then assigned the complaint to an Ethical Standards Officer for investigation. In the meantime Councillor Allen's term of office ended on 5 May 2011 when he failed to be re-elected.

The final investigation report had been received, and a copy was attached to the agenda. The report concluded that Councillor Allen had acted in breach of the Code of Conduct but that no action should be taken. A public summary of the complaint would be made available on the Standards for England website but the full contents of the report remained confidential.

Members gave close consideration to the contents and findings of the Ethical Standards Officer's report, and discussed whether the case highlighted any 'learning points' for the Council's ethical framework. While some concerns were expressed at the way e-mails had been communicated in this instance,

the general view was that there were already sufficient policies and protocols in place to regulate and moderate the usage of ICT.

RESOLVED – that the contents of the Ethical Standards Officer’s investigation report into the conduct of former Councillor Denis Allen be noted.

The meeting ended at 6.27 pm

Chairman:

Date: