

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD ON FRIDAY, 15 JULY, 2005**

Present: B Joyce, W Local, E Smith
and B Burn

Apologies: B Wilson

THE CHAIR EXPRESSED THE COMMITTEE'S SADNESS AT THE DEATH OF COUNCILLOR W HORSFIELD WHO HAD BEEN A MEMBER OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

1. **ELECTION OF CHAIR**

RESOLVED that Mr W Local be elected Chair of the Standards Committee for the ensuing year.

MR W LOCAL TOOK THE CHAIR

2. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR**

RESOLVED that Councillor B Burn be appointed Vice Chair of the Standards Committee for the ensuing year.

3. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 22 April 2005, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

PRIOR TO THE FOLLOWING ITEM OF BUSINESS COUNCILLOR B JOYCE DECLARED A PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTEREST AND LEFT THE MEETING

4. **REQUEST FOR DISPENSATION FOR PETERLEE TOWN COUNCIL**

Consideration was given to the report of the Monitoring Officer which gave details of a request for Dispensation from the obligation to declare prejudicial interests in connection with a report to be considered by Peterlee Town Council relating to subsidy on a proposed twinning visit to Nordenham, Germany in 2006, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Monitoring Officer advised that in order to ensure the success of the visit to Nordenham to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Council's twinning partnership, Peterlee Town Council wished to consider the merits of subsidising the cost of the trip for participants. Participants on these visits generally included a mixture of Councillors and members of the public who expressed an interest in travelling. Clearly any Member who would be interested in undertaking the trip had a financial interest in the cost being subsidised. Any Member whose relatives or friends had an intention of applying to go on the twinning visit would also have a financial interest in the outcome of the decision.

Such interests would constitute a prejudicial interest and would, in the absence of dispensation, prevent the Member participating in the debate and

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voting on the report. In the circumstances it was likely that more than 50% of the Town Council would have a prejudicial interest in the report.

The Relevant Authorities (Standards Committee) (Dispensations) Regulations 2002 permitted the Standards Committee to grant dispensation in those circumstances if they considered that the transaction of the Council's business would be impeded as a result of the Code of Conduct and if in all circumstances of the case they considered it appropriate to grant dispensation.

The Monitoring Officer was satisfied that the granting of the dispensation to permit the Town Council Members to determine the report could be justified even though some financial benefit may accrue to those Members who participated in the visit if the recommendation was approved.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) approval be granted for the dispensation to Peterlee Town Council Members to debate and vote on the question of whether a subsidy should be made available to persons participating in the proposed twinning to Nordenham in 2006.
- (ii) the dispensation be granted on the basis that the visit was to mark the 25th anniversary of the Council's twinning with Nordenham.

COUNCILLOR B JOYCE RE-JOINED THE MEETING

5. ADDITIONAL URGENT ITEM OF BUSINESS

In accordance with the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985, Section 100B (4)(b) the Chair, following consultation with the Proper Officer agreed that the following item of business, not shown on the agenda, be considered as a matter of urgency.

6. HEARING IN RELATION TO POSSIBLE FAILURE TO FOLLOW THE CODE OF CONDUCT (AOB)

The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that at a meeting of the Standards Sub-Committee held on Tuesday, 12th July, 2005, Members considered an allegation made by the Monitoring Officer that Councillor S Huntington had failed to comply with the Council's Code of Conduct in that he sought to improperly influence a decision during a meeting of the Council's Working Executive on 7th September, 2004.

The Sub Committee determined that at a meeting of the Working Executive held on 7 September 2004 Councillor S Huntington spoke on a report concerning the proposed restructuring of the Environmental Services Section in which he had a personal and prejudicial interest.

Councillor Huntington's participation in discussion on the report constituted a breach of the District of Easingtons Members' Code of Conduct, Paragraph 5(a) in seeking by his actions improperly to confer an advantage upon his son. His participation also constituted a breach of Paragraph 12(a)(iii) of the Code in seeking to improperly influence discussion on a matter in which he had a personal and prejudicial interest.

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Members were advised that the sanctions imposed on Councillor Huntington were that:-

- (i) he be suspended for a period of three months from his role as Executive Member for Corporate Services. This suspension to also apply to meetings of the Executive, Working Executive and any other meeting which he would normally attend as an Executive Member;
- (ii) he submit a written apology to everyone who was present at the Working Executive on 7th September, 2004.

In addition the Sub-Committee also recommended that the District Council revisit the need for training of Councillors in relation to the Code, stressing their duty to comply with the Code at all times.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

JW/CS/COM/STAN/050701
26 July 2005