

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Committee held in Box 13, Durham County Cricket Ground, Riverside, Chester-le-Street on Thursday 8 December 2005 at 4.00pm.

PRESENT:

Mr D Fisher (Independent Member and Chairman), Reverend E Davidson (Independent Member), Mr M Dulieu (Parish Councillor), Miss V McEwan (Independent Member), M Graham (Independent Member), Councillor W Laverick and Councillor S C L Westrip

Officers: C Potter (Monitoring Officer) and D Allinson (Democratic Services Assistant)

Prior to commencement of the Meeting, the Chairman conveyed Christmas Wishes to the Committee and welcomed Councillor Westrip to his first Meeting of the Committee.

48 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor C Carr.

49 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 27 OCTOBER 2005

RESOLVED: "That the minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Committee held 27 October 2005, copies of which had previously been circulated to each Member, be confirmed as being a correct record."

The Chairman proceeded to sign the minutes.

50 MATTERS ARISING

It was noted that matters arising from the previous minutes were listed on the agenda for discussion.

51 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest received from Members.

52 DRAFT ARTICLE FOR DISTRICT NEWS

The Chairman advised that he had produced a draft article for the District News, which was not ready to be presented at this Meeting, however he would bring this to the next Meeting.

Discussion ensued on the contents of article, which the Committee hoped would reflect the views of the Committee in comparison to the previous article, which they felt had been restricted through the editing process.

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager advised that there was a need to create greater public awareness of the role of the Committee through articles in the District News and that a suitable arrangement needed to be put in place on the way forward for these publications for the future.

RESOLVED: "That the draft article be submitted to the next Meeting of the Standards Committee."

53 TRAINING REQUIREMENTS AND FUNDING

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager advised that he had met with the Director of Resources and Officers to discuss growth bids for funding. At the Meeting he had advised of the need for the Standards Committee to have a separate budget, which was a view, also supported by the Leader of the Council, however no decision had yet been taken on this and that he was awaiting their comments.

RESOLVED: "That the situation be noted."

54 MECHANISM FOR THE REPLACEMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Chairman advised that the independent Members had held a pre-meeting prior to commencement of the Committee to discuss ideas for the replacement of the independent Members of the Standards Committee. It had been suggested that the term of office be for four years, with one re-election for a further four years, which equates to eight years service and that there be staggered exits.

Reverend Davidson advised of the need for a mechanism to be put in place for the staggered exits so that Members did not leave at the same time.

The Monitoring Officer advised that it was up to individuals themselves to decide when they wished to leave, however he would prepare a report to assist the Committee.. He clarified that at present the Council's Constitution did not contain a protocol to cover phasing, which he felt needed looking at not just for this Committee, but also to assist newly elected Members.

Reverend Davidson suggested that independent Members decide on whether they wish to stand for a further term nearer to the time of re-election in March in case personal circumstances change.

Discussion ensued on the formal appointment procedure. The Monitoring Officer clarified that requests for re-appointment of positions would be decided at the Council Meeting.

Miss McEwan queried whether it would be more cost effective to undergo the recruitment process at the same time rather than at staggered intervals. The Monitoring Officer suggested that he would need to enquire as to the future costs for this process to be undertaken and incorporate this in the report.

RESOLVED: "That the Monitoring Officer produce a report to the Standards Committee on a mechanism for the replacement of independent Members."

At the close of the Meeting, the Monitoring Officer updated the Committee on the training he had been undertaking to raise awareness on the registration of Members interests to Parish and District Councils. He advised that over the last few months he had distributed booklets and guidance to 145 District and Parish Councillors. He advised that the next phase was to look at the replies and create an electronic version of returns. He advised that general information on Members interests was to be added to the Council's website.

Discussion ensued by the Committee on the training sessions, which had been held, and the documentation provided which they found useful.

Councillor Laverick suggested that further training be held altogether at the Civic Centre to save on resources. The Monitoring Officer took on board this suggestion, however he did feel it necessary for his first visit to be carried out in the community and then hold follow up sessions at the Civic Centre.

The Monitoring Officer advised of a Standards Committee training event he had been advised of which was to be held by Sedgefield Borough Council. He proceeded to read out the e-mail, which outlined the details of the training event. Members felt that this training may be similar to that which they had already attended and therefore requested that the Monitoring Officer check before reserving places on the course. It was noted that two places would be required for the new Members of the Committee.

Discussion ensued on the non-attendance at the training sessions and meetings and the need to increase attendance at Meetings. He advised that there may be a need to review the frequency of Meetings and suggested that this could be discussed at the next Meeting.

56 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED: "That the next Meeting be held on Thursday 26 January 2006 at 4.00pm."

The meeting terminated at 4.55pm.