

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor.

Wednesday,
4th September 2002

Time : 2.00 p.m.

Present: Mr. L. Petterson (Chairman and Independent member) and
Councillors Mrs. A.M. Armstrong, D.M. Fraser and
Mrs. A.D. Mumford.

Parish/Town Council member
Councillor J. Marr

Apologies Councillor G. F. Chaplin and B. Meek

Independent member
Mr. C. Greenwell

ST.2/01 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting dated the 10th April 2002 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman of the meeting. (For copy see file of Minutes).

ST.3/01 PROGRESS AND UPDATE REPORT

The Council's Solicitor and Monitoring Officer presented a progress and update report. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was noted that since the last meeting the Council had adopted the Model Code of Conduct and its Constitution as a requirement of the Local Government Act 2000.

Training Forums had been held for the Standards Committee and Borough, Parish and Town Council Members, Officers and Clerks. These had taken place on the 7th June, 14th June and 27th June. Participants were given the opportunity to participate in workshops that provided examples of potential ethical misconduct. Further training would take place later in the year.

As well as guidance issued by the Standards Board for England both in leaflet form and in the form of bulletins a series of Standards Guidance Notes had been issued on behalf of the Committee. To date three such notes had been issued to Parish and Town Council Clerks dealing with topics such as advice on the local Codes of Conduct and Members interests, declaration of interests at meetings and registers of interests and gifts of hospitality - procedural arrangements. Further guidance notes

would be issued covering the terms under which dispensations may be granted by the Standards Committee.

In respect of Web based registers, the statutory registers were currently being collated. Issues had arisen regarding the Council's commitment to use the Internet for publication purposes. On advice from the Standards Board for England it had been decided to seek the individual consent of Members for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998. Only those Members who expressed consent to their registered information being made available on the Internet would have it published. Due to limited staffing resources in the I. T. section the production of the registers had been delayed and a further report would be made to the next meeting of the Standards Committee on what progress had been made.

The Committee was reminded that it was empowered to grant dispensations to Borough, Parish and Town Councils where problems might arise regarding difficulties in conducting Council business due to disclosure rules. Two requests have been received from Sedgefield Town Council and Spennymoor Town Council in each case requesting a general dispensation in relation to prejudicial interests. The Council's had been advised that there may be difficulties in seeking such general dispensations and further information had been sought. Further consideration would be given to these requests together with advice from the Standards Board. It was pointed out that it may be necessary to convene a further meeting of the Standards Committee in order to consider these requests once guidance had been provided.

It was queried how general dispensations would operate. In particular there was concern regarding Councillors who served on two authorities. It was felt that guidance should be clearer and the Council's Solicitor and Monitoring Officer would take up this issue with the Standards Board. The issue of registers of interest would also be addressed.

The Solicitor and Monitoring Officer would also ascertain whether the Standards Board intended to develop guidance that dealt with conflicts of interest in instances where Members held positions on external bodies such as health trusts and Community Health Councils.

An invitation had been received from Durham County Council to attend a training session for members of the Standards Committee due to take place on Tuesday 17th September 2002. The session would provide an opportunity to discuss possible options for joint working. In addition, representatives of the Standards Board for England would be in attendance. The

event would take place from 9.30am until 3.30pm at St. Mary's College, Durham. It was agreed that Councillors Mrs. A. M. Armstrong and D. M. Fraser would attend the event together with the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer. Any papers made available at the meeting would be circulated to all members of the Committee.

It was noted that the Standards Board had received a complaint in respect of a Member of the Borough Council. A detailed report would be presented to the Standards Committee once the Standards Board had conducted its investigation. Due to the sensitive nature of the matter the report would be dealt with as an exempt item.

Recommended:

1. *That the report be received.*
2. *That Councillors Mrs A. M. Armstrong and D. M. Fraser attend the training workshop for Standards Committees on Tuesday 17th September 2002.*

ST.4/01 VIDEO PRESENTATION – THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND

The Standards Committee was shown a video entitled the Standards Board for England, which outlined the role of this body.

ST.5/01 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was suggested that the next meeting of the Standards Committee should be held in December 2002.

Chairman of meeting held on 27th January 2003

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

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