

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

HELD ON MONDAY 23 APRIL 2007

Present: W. Local (Chair)
B Burn, E. Smith, Mrs M. Goyns
and Miss J. Clark

Apologies: Councillors B. Wilson and R G. Wharrier

1. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 13 February 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.
2. **ADOPTION OF A NEW CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COUNCILLORS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Monitoring Officer which advised of the new Code of Conduct for Members which had been laid before Parliament, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Members were advised that the original Code of Conduct for Councillors was adopted in 2002. The Department for Communities and Local Government and the Standards Board had considered how that Code could be improved based upon experience of its operation. Following consultation, a final draft was laid before Parliament on 4 April 2007. Unless challenged successfully by Parliament, it would become law on 3rd May 2007 and Local Authorities were recommended to adopt the new Code without amendment.

It was explained that the timing of the publication of the Code left very little time for its consideration before Members were required to sign their agreement to comply with the Code following the Elections on 3rd May 2007.

The Monitoring Officer therefore invited the Standards Committee to consider the Code before its formal endorsement by Parliament. This was on the understanding that if Parliament made any radical changes to the draft, it would be brought back to the Standards Committee before the Council was invited to act upon the recommendation. Considering the Code now, would enable the Council to adopt it at its Annual Meeting and enable new Members to be inducted on the new Code rather than being trained on the old Code only for it to be replaced a month or so later.

The Monitoring Officer took Members through the report in detail highlighting the following areas where there had been significant changes: -

- Scope
- General Obligations
- Confidential Information
- Reporting Other Members for Breach
- Personal Interest
- Relatives, Friends etc
- Disclosure of Personal Interest
- Prejudicial Interest
- Sensitive Information

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The Monitoring Officer advised that he intended to add a number of principles to the Code of Conduct. These principles were to be used by Members as a guide to the Standards of Conduct expected of them. They did not form part of the Code of Conduct for the purposes of determining if a Councillor had committed a breach of the Code of Conduct.

Members should promote and support the principles by leadership and by example and should act in a way that secured or preserved public confidence.

RESOLVED that the new Model Code of Conduct for Councillors be approved and submitted to the Annual Meeting of the District Council on 17th May 2007 for adoption.

3. STANDARDS TRAINING EVENT - THE NEW CODE AND A NEW MOCK HEARING

The Monitoring Officer advised that Sedgefield District Council had organised a training event to be presented by Mr. Peter Keith Lucas of Bevan Brittain, Solicitors on 27 June 2007.

Following discussion, it was suggested that the Monitoring Officer plus five Members of the Standards Committee be authorised to attend. Places would be booked and names would be advised following the Elections on 3 May 2007.

RESOLVED that the Monitoring Officer plus five Members of the Standards Committee be authorised to attend the training event to be held on 27 June 2007.

4. ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND

The Monitoring Officer advised that the Annual Assembly of the Standards Board for England would be held on 15 and 16 October 2007.

Members were advised that last year the Monitoring Officer had attended the Assembly as a speaker at the expense of the Standards Board. The Monitoring Officer suggested that in light of the new Code of Conduct and the emphasis on local investigation and determination of complaints, it would be worthwhile sending at least one delegate to this year's Assembly.

Following discussion, it was suggested that the Monitoring Officer, together with one Member of the Standards Committee be authorised to attend the Annual Assembly of the Standards Board for England on 15 and 16 October 2007. The name of the Standards Committee Member to be advised following the Elections on 3 May 2007.

RESOLVED that the Monitoring Officer together with one Member from the Standards Committee be authorised to attend the Annual Assembly of the Standards Board for England on 15 and 16 October 2007.

5. STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND'S ROADSHOW

The Monitoring Officer advised that four places had been booked on the Standards Board for England's Roadshow to be held at Newcastle on 12 June 2007.

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Following discussion it was suggested that the Monitoring Officer, Miss J. Clark, E. Smith and one District Councillor from the Standards Committee be authorised to attend the roadshow.

RESOLVED that the Monitoring Officer, Miss J. Clark, E. Smith and one District Councillor from the Standards Committee be authorised to attend the Standards Board for England's Roadshow.

6. 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 following item of business, not shown on the Agenda, be considered as a matter of urgency.

7. PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL DISPENSATIONS (AOB)

The Chair explained that the Standards Committee had considered and granted a number of requests for dispensation from Parish/Town Councils over the last four years. It was suggested that the Monitoring Officer contact all Parish/Town Councils advising that if they found themselves in a similar position following the Elections on 3 May 2007 they would need to re-submit their request for dispensation.

RESOLVED that the Monitoring Officer write to all Parish/Town Councils reminding them of the need to request a dispensation if necessary.

JW/CB/STANDARDS/070403
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