

To: **All Members of the Standards Committee**

Councillors B Burn, A J Holmes, Mrs S Mason and B Wilson

Mr W Local, Mr E Smith, Mrs M Goyns, Miss J Clark

## **STANDARDS BOARD CONFERENCE 15 – 16 OCTOBER 2007**

This was a very practical conference focussing upon the responsibilities which Local Standards Committees will inherit next year (anticipated to be April 2008) when the Standards Board cease to be involved in investigating complaints and take on a regulatory role. A number of issues emerged which will require decisions from the Standards Committee in forthcoming weeks if the legislation and regulations are produced in the form anticipated.

### **SIZE OF THE COMMITTEE**

Delegates were advised that the minimum number appropriate for a Standards Committee, will be 9. I believe that is probably 10 and I will be inviting the Committee to consider increase its size to 12. It was encouraging to learn that the Standards Board take the view that the Sub-Committee who decide at the outside whether a complaint should be investigated are not prevented from sitting in judgement at the completion of the investigation. However, we do need to have a review body to hear appeals from dissatisfied complainants if the original Sub-Committee decide not to investigate. Each Sub-Committee should be chaired by an Independent member. I am therefore recommending that we advertise for a third Independent member to avoid being embarrassed if one of our two Independent members is unavailable for any length of time after his colleague has already dealt with a complaint.

Any complaint involving a Parish Councillor must have a Parish member sitting on the Sub-Committee. We therefore need a third Parish Member to ensure that we are not wholly dependent on any single individual to be able to progress a case involving a Parish.

If those two recommendations are followed, the Committee would go up to 10, of which only 4 would be District Councillors. It is a matter for the Council whether they would regard that change in balance as something they would wish to adjust. There would certainly be no harm from the Monitoring Officers perspective if he had a couple of extra Councillors available to call upon with the Committee rounded up to 12. If the Council were more than happy to leave a Parish/Independent majority on the Committee, 10 should still be workable if the current thinking on what constitutes a conflict remains.

### **PUBLICITY**

Once the public need to be told that any complaints should go to the Monitoring Officer rather than to the Standards Board in Manchester, we will need to publicise that change in arrangements. It was suggested that it may be appropriate to incorporate the procedures for complaining against your Councillor with the documentation we currently circulate explaining to people how you can complain if dissatisfied with the actions of the Council. I will be consulting with David Payne, the Customer Services Manager, on the merits of incorporating reference to complaints against Councillors in the Council's literature on complaints generally, rather than treating it as a separate subject.

I am circulating this report whilst it is fresh in my mind after the conference. I will propose that we discuss the recommendations at our next meeting. If anyone has any comments in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me.

**David Taylor**

DT/CB/REPORTS/071000