

**CITY OF DURHAM**

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**16 May 2006**

**REPORT OF MONITORING OFFICER**

1. **Parish Representative Vacancy**

I have been in touch with the Executive Officer of the County Durham Association of Local Councils regarding the vacancy on the Standards Committee for one additional parish representative. Mr Ragg has advised me that he is currently trying to resurrect the Durham District Local Councils' Committee who in the past have appointed representatives to the Standards Committee. He is having some difficulty in this regard however, and he advises me that he is having similar difficulties with resurrecting similar bodies in Wear Valley, Derwentside and Darlington.

He suggests that the process may well be extended. He is reporting upon progress to the next meeting of the Executive Committee which is scheduled to be held on the 7 June 2006 to seek their views and he has promised that if anything happens in the interim he will keep me advised.

Recommended that the report be noted.

2. **Training Event – Sedgefield Borough Council 4 April 2006**

A training event facilitated by Mr Peter Keith-Lucas of Bevan Britten Solicitors was held at Sedgefield Borough Council on the 4 April 2006 and four places were reserved by the City Council for the Independent Members of the Standards Committee and Councillor Beswick, the Parish representative.

Feedback from the event has been provided by your Chairman and Vice Chairman and their respective notes are attached as Appendix A.

3. **Annual Conference of the Standards Board for England – 16/17 October 2006**

The Leader has authorised the attendance of the Vice Chairman at this year's conference.

Recommended that the report be noted.

4. **Terms of Reference**

There will be a meeting of Full Council on the 11 July 2006.

Council at its meeting in November 2005 considered the issue of terms of reference for the Standards Committee and determined that the terms of reference should remain unchanged with the intention of reviewing these at Annual Council in May 2007.

Under the City Council's Council Procedure Rules a motion of amendment in similar terms to one which has been rejected at a meeting of the Council in the past 6 months, cannot be moved unless the notice of motion of amendment is signed by a minimum of 25 members of the Council.

The 6 months time limit will have expired in July and therefore, in accordance with the wishes of the Standards Committee, I will be in a position to ask Council to reconsider their earlier decision in relation to extending the terms of reference of the committee.

Members will recall that the previous request was to extend the terms of reference by making provision for the following:-

- i) Monitoring and reviewing performance under the Council's corporate complaints procedure and monitoring investigations conducted by the Local Government Ombudsman
- ii) The overview of the Council's confidential reporting policy.

Members' instructions are requested on whether they still wish to press for an extension in these terms.

## 5. **Local Hearings**

Members will recall that there was some discussion at the last meeting of the Standards Committee in relation to the Constitution of the panel to hear allegations against Councillors. The recommendation of the Standards Board for England is that allegations should be heard not by the full Standards Committee but by a smaller panel of three or a maximum of five members.

Some time ago the Standards Committee decided that it did not wish to delegate the issue of local hearings to a sub-committee but instead wanted hearings to be dealt with by the whole committee.

When the matter was discussed at the last meeting most of the committee were still supportive of that view. There was a feeling that the provision of a smaller panel might lead to allegations of a lack of political balance. The view was however expressed that a full committee of up to nine members could be overpowering to anyone who had been complained against. It was agreed therefore that the matter would be put on the agenda for this meeting, for further consideration.

The Relevant Authorities (Standards Committee) Regulations 2001 provide that a meeting of the Standards Committee or sub-committee is not quorate unless at least three members of the committee are present for the duration of the meeting. These three members must include at least one independent member and if the Standards Committee is considering a parish matter then the committee must include at least one parish council representative.

Members' instructions are sought.

## 6. **Ethical Governance Audit**

The Standards Committee carried out an Ethical Governance Audit in 2004 and it was decided at the time that the exercise would be repeated during 2006.

A report will be brought to the next meeting of the committee with proposals for the carrying out of the next audit.

Recommended that the report be noted.

7. **Schedule of Meetings**

I attach as Appendix B a schedule of the meetings for the present municipal year.

The time table for meetings during 2007/8 is currently being finalised and I will report upon the dates of meetings of the Standards Committee as soon as the schedule has been approved.

8. **Brancepeth Parish Council**

At the request of Brancepeth Parish Council I am attending their meeting on the 18 May 2006 to speak about Ethical Governance matters and the Code of Conduct. The Clerk to Brancepeth Parish Council has indicated that representatives of other parishes may wish to attend and a general invitation has gone to all parishes.

Recommended that the report be noted.

9. **Bulletin 28**

The latest bulletin from the Standards Board for England, Bulletin 28 is attached as Appendix C.