

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Committee held in Conference Room No.3, Civic Centre, Newcastle Road, Chester-le-Street on Thursday 25 May 2006 at 4.00pm.

PRESENT:

Mr D Fisher (Independent Member), Reverend E Davidson (Independent Member), Miss V McEwan (Independent Member), M Graham (Independent Member), M Delieu (Independent Member), Councillors W Laverick, S C L Westrip and C Carr.

Officers: C Potter (Monitoring Officer) and S Marshall (Democratic Services Assistant).

72 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

73 URGENT BUSINESS

Immediately prior to commencement of the meeting, the Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that Mr Fisher had indicated his immediate intention to stand down as Chairman of the Committee.

In view of this, the Monitoring Officer invited nominees for Chairman.

Reverend Davidson was nominated, seconded and appointed as Chairman and proceeded to Chair the meeting. He thanked Mr Fisher for all of his work over the past 2 years as Chairman. He suggested that Vice-Chairman be appointed at the next meeting of the Committee.

74 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 23 FEBRUARY 2006

RESOLVED: "That the minutes of the proceedings of the meeting held 25 May 2006, copies of which had previously been circulated to each Member, be confirmed as being a correct record."

The Chairman proceeded to sign the Minutes.

75 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

76 DRAFT ARTICLE FOR DISTRICT NEWS

The Monitoring Officer apologised for not having produced a final draft article for District News. He advised that, although Mr Fisher had provided him with a

draft article, he had not been able to work on this due to other work commitments having higher priority.

He suggested that future articles be built into the Committee's work programme to coincide with District News deadlines.

Mr Dulieu suggested that the Committee produced its own publication, which could be delivered at the same time as District News.

Mr Fisher advised that he had produced an article previously but it had been edited before being published and it hadn't portrayed the message he had wanted it to.

Councillor Westrip advised that, as he was Portfolio Holder for Communication, he would be interested in any such issues.

Councillor Laverick stated that as the Committee was totally independent of the Council than as long as the legal content of any document it produced was correct then it should not be edited.

Mr Fisher suggested that the new Chairman could also have some input to the article which was now 90% completed.

Discussion ensued with regard to possible means of publishing future articles such as leaflets and through the Council's website.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted and the Monitoring Officer explore the different possibilities of publishing future articles."

77 ANNUAL REPORT OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Monitoring Officer advised that an annual report of the Committee had not yet been produced but that he would prepare a draft report for the next meeting of the Committee. He stated that the report was a good tool to be able to look back over the past year but also to look forward and include a work programme for the forthcoming year.

Councillor Carr raised a concern regarding Residents Associations and representatives of LSPs and whether the Standards Committee had any control over they decisions made.

The Monitoring Officer advised that as these were groups of un-elected individuals with common aims to support residents of certain areas, the Standards Committee had no direct jurisdiction over residents associations but it was sensible to think about extending the message to members and groups of the public regarding ethics and probity within Local Government. He went on to advise that it was important to bear in mind that LSP representatives don't have the authority to make decisions and the aim of the Standards Committee was to ensure confidence in local democracy and

decision making and that the public were aware of how and where to make a complaint.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted and the Monitoring Officer produce a draft Annual Report of the Standards Committee for the next meeting of the Committee."

78 ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

The Monitoring Officer advised that it was important to try and work out the emphasis on various aspects of the Committee's role for the forthcoming year and for the Committee as a whole to decide upon the work programme. He advised that this would also raise public awareness of the Standards Committee.

Councillor Carr suggested that the Chairman and the Monitoring Officer attending the Parish Council Liaison Meeting with a view to raising awareness.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted and the Monitoring Officer prepare a draft work programme for the next meeting of the Committee."

79 ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

The Monitoring Officer advised that the funding for Members to attend the Annual Assembly needed to be ascertained so that plans regarding how many and which Members would be able to attend.

Mr Fisher suggested that 2 Independent Members and 1 elected Member attend the assembly along with the Monitoring Officer.

The Monitoring Officer clarified that the funding for an officer to attend was available from a separate budget.

Councillor Westrip advised that it may be possible for the funding for an elected Member to attend be met from a separate budget also.

Councillor Westrip left the meeting at this point.

The Chairman suggested that himself, Miss McEwan, Mr Graham and Councillor Westrip be nominated to attend the Assembly.

RESOLVED: "That Reverend Davidson, Miss McEwan, Mr Graham, Councillor Westrip and the Monitoring Officer attend the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees subject to available funding."

80 TRAINING REQUIREMENTS AND FUNDING

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that training had been delivered to Parish Councils and District Councillors on certain aspects, however all training was resource dependant.

Mr Dulieu commented that after the Monitoring Officer had visited Waldrige Parish Council there was a general feeling that the Parish Council had made a connection with the District Council.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted."

81 REGISTER OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that at the Annual Council Meeting later that day, Members would be appointed to outside bodies and that within the following weeks he would send reminder letters asking Members to notify any changes to the Registers of Interests.

He also advised that he was in the process of creating electronic versions of the registers and that they would soon be available for public inspection.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted."

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

The Monitoring Officer advised that the terms of office of Members of the Standards Committee needed approval of the Council.

Reverend Davidson advised that this item had been discussed on several occasions and that the Committee had decided upon a 4-year term with re-election for a second term.

The Monitoring Officer advised that he would forward the recommendation to the Council and for Members to mind that suitable phasing of Members leaving and joining the Committee would be required.

RESOLVED: "That the term of office of a 4-year term with a re-election for a second term for Independent Members of the Standards Committee be recommended to the Council."

83 PROGRESS ON APPOINTMENT OF ADDITIONAL PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE

The Monitoring Officer advised that a Parish Council Representative would be appointed by the Council within the next few weeks and that the appropriate training for that Member would be required.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted."

84 FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

Mr Graham advised that this item had been discussed at previous meetings of the Committee and Members had agreed to meet bi-monthly with training sessions to be held on the alternate months.

RESOLVED: "That future meetings of the Committee be held bi-monthly with training sessions for Members to be held on the alternate months."

85 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED: "That the next meeting of the Committee be held on 20 July 2006 at 4.00pm."

The Meeting terminated at 5.16pm.