

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 7 December 2006 at 4.00pm.

PRESENT:

Reverend E Davidson (Chairman and Independent Member), M Dulieu (Parish Council Representative), Mr D Fisher (Independent Member), Miss V McEwan (Independent Member), Mrs G Stephenson (Parish Council Representative) and Councillor S C L Westrip.

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

21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Mr M Graham.

22 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 28 SEPTEMBER 2006

RESOLVED: "That the minutes of the proceedings of the meeting held 28 September 2006, copies of which had previously been circulated to each Member, be confirmed as being a correct record."

23 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

24 DECISION TRACKER

The Monitoring Officer advised Members on the progress made on each item on the Decision Tracker.

The Chairman referred to the possibilities of producing future articles and in particular, an article for the District News. He advised that the deadline for the next publication was 3 February 2007 and the Committee would need to decide on a topic for the article and who would produce it.

Discussion ensued with regard to problems encountered in the past with regards to editing. Councillor Westrip suggested that he discuss this matter with the Communications and Public Relations Officer.

The Chairman suggested that Miss McEwan prepare an article prior to the deadline for District News.

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that he would be submitting a report to Council on 21 December, advising of the recommendations made by the Committee for the Term of Office for Independent Members.

RESOLVED: "That the contents of the decision tracker be noted and

- a) that Councillor Westrip meet with the Communications and Public Relations Officer to discuss problems with editing articles for District News;
- b) that Miss McEwan produce a draft article for the next issue of District News and;
- c) that the Monitoring Officer submit a report to the December meeting of the Council to advise of the recommendations made by the Committee for the Term of Office for Independent Members of the Standards Committee."

25 BUDGET OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Monitoring Officer advised that the budgets for the following financial year had still to be set.

He went on to advise that the current year's budget was £3,000 and Mrs Stephenson queried if this was not all spent within the current year would any under-spend be carried forward to the following year.

The Monitoring Officer advised he was not aware that any under-spend would be carried forward but that he thought the majority of budget would be used as the forthcoming investigation had to be financed from this budget.

Discussion ensued with regard to the estimated cost of the investigation and opportunities for better use of the budget. The Monitoring Officer suggested that he could discuss the cost implications of an investigation at the next meeting of the County Monitoring Officers Group. He advised that he would also discuss partnership working, such as interchangeable Monitoring Officers, with other local authorities in County Durham.

The Chairman queried whether there would be funds available to produce a Standards Committee information leaflet and suggested that information was first gathered from other local authorities and also suggested the production of a county-wide leaflet.

The Monitoring Officer suggested that the new Code of Conduct be publicised at the same time as issuing an information leaflet.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted."

26 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Monitoring Officer referred to the Draft Annual Report of the Standards Committee, circulated at the last meeting of the Committee, and asked Members for their comments.

Miss McEwan stated that she felt that the report was too narrative and reflected the work of the Monitoring Officer rather than the Committee as a whole.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the report was only a draft and that the Committee could change the style and content if it so wished.

The Chairman suggested that the Members consider the report at the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted and the Draft Report of the Standards Committee be considered at the next meeting of the Committee."

27 WORK SCHEDULE OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE UP TO MAY 2007

The Monitoring Officer referred to the Draft Work Programme for the Committee, which he circulated at the meeting and advised that it only outlined work up to March 2007 and that the Committee needed to decide its programme from April 2007 onwards.

Councillor Westrip queried the likely impact of the forthcoming elections and the possibility of certain Members not being re-elected.

The Monitoring Officer replied that until the event, he was unable to say how many new Members there would be but hi-lighted the issues which would have an effect upon the work programme, such as training new Members, completing the Registers of Interest forms and compiling the registers.

Miss McEwan queried the local hearing scheduled for February.

The Monitoring Officer advised that this was a matter for the Committee to decide but that there was a time limit of 3 months in which to hold the hearing from when the report is received.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted."

28 MOCK HEARING AND TRAINING SESSION ON THE LOCAL HEARING PROCESS

The Monitoring Officer advised that there had been a delay in receiving the DVD from the Standards Board but that this had now arrived and would be shown to Members after the meeting.

He advised that he hoped to hold a mock hearing in late January/early February and that he would find out if any training material was available from other Monitoring Officers within the county.

He requested that Members advise him if they were unavailable at any times from January to March 2007.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted and a mock hearing be held during late January/early February."

29 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED: "That the next meeting of the Committee be held on Thursday 25 January 2007 at 4.00pm."

The meeting terminated at 5.11pm.