

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET

Report of the meeting of Standards Committee held in the Conference Room 3, Civic Centre, Newcastle Road, Chester-le-Street, Co Durham, DH3 3UT on Thursday, 12 March 2009 at 4.00 pm

PRESENT:

Miss Vera G McEwan, Mr Malcolm Graham, Mr James Armstrong and Mrs Gill Stephenson

Officers: C Potter (Head of Legal and Democratic Services) and M Fell (Democratic Services Assistant)

34. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor W Laverick, L Henderson and I Clarkson.

35. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD 18 DECEMBER 2008

RESOLVED: "That the Minutes of the Meeting held 18 December 2008, copies of which had previously been circulated to each member, be confirmed as being a correct record."

The Chair proceeded to sign the minutes.

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

37. CODE OF CONDUCT

The Chair spoke in relation to the consultation paper on the Code of Conduct for Local Authority Members and Employees, as the deadline for responses to the consultation had now passed.

She queried whether Members of the Committee had made any representations to the Standards Board for England, in relation to the proposal.

In relation to comment made by the Chair, the Monitoring Officer advised that he had not receive any feedback in relation to the consultation but felt it would be too soon as only a limited period of time had passed since the deadline for responses.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted".

38. REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Chair referred to the Register of Members' Interests and advised of the importance of this document, as the Council were required to pass over the register to the new authority when they ceased to exist on 1st April 2009.

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that letters had been sent to Parish Councillors as a reminder that they needed to be compliant with the Code and to notify the Monitoring Officer of their interests in order for the Register of Members' Interests to be updated.

He further advised Members that as each existing authority held their Registers in a variety of different formats, a decision had been made to allow this to continue with the intention of the centralisation of the registers, in the future.

In relation to a query raised by the Chair, the Monitoring Officer advised that a letter had been sent to all Parish Councils from the County Council, which provided information in relation to the current and future arrangements for each Council.

The Monitoring Officer clarified that the District Council's registers would be kept for a period of time, in case a complaint was made concerning a Councillor in the future. Once a period of time had passed the County Council would arrange for the registered to be destroyed.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted".

39. CONSTITUTION AND FUNCTIONS OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Monitoring Officer advised that copies of the annual reports for 2008/2009 had been handed out to the Members. He stated that the report would form part of the Annual Governance Statement issued by the Council.

In relation to a comment made by the Chair, the Monitoring Officer advised that the County Council were currently undertaking the recruitment process for additional Independent Members. He stated that interviews were due to take place shortly.

In relation to a query raised by Mr Armstrong on the new County Council's Constitution, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that it was due to be approved by Members in April.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted".

40. HEARINGS AND INVESTIGATIONS

There were no hearings or investigations to be considered by Members.

The Monitoring Officer advised that to assist with transitional arrangements, the Standards Board for England had issued regulations, which require any

investigations which occur less than 14 days before the District Council ceases to exist, would be formally dealt with by the new Authority.

The Monitoring Officer spoke in relation to the work Members had carried out since the formation of the Standards Committee, with particular emphasis being placed on the work Members undertook during the investigation and hearing of a Parish Councillor, in 2007.

He further commented that the completion of the second statistical return to the Standards Board for England on behalf of the Council was due shortly and advised that separate arrangements had been agreed for the District Councils' affect by Local Government Review (LGR).

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted".

41. PUBLIC AWARENESS

In relation to a query raised by the Chair on public awareness, the Monitoring Officer advised that an article featuring the contact details for the New County Councillors would be placed in the final issue of Council's District News magazine. He further advised that the magazine would be distributed to homes throughout the District.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted".

42. FINAL STATEMENT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE OF CHESTER-LE-STREET DISTRICT COUNCIL

The Chair advised that this was the last Standards Committee of this Council and took the opportunity to thank both Members past and present and Officers, who had contributed to the work undertaken by the Committee over the years.

The Monitoring Officer gave thanks to Members of the Committee for their efforts on behalf of the community over the years.

Mr Armstrong also conveyed his thanks to all Officers and Members who had been involved in the Standards Committee work.

The Chair requested that any comments in relation to the Annual Report 2008/2009 be forwarded to the Monitoring Officer as soon as possible.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted".

The meeting terminated at 4.25 pm