

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Committee held in Conference Room No.4, Civic Centre, Newcastle Road, Chester-le-Street on Thursday 28 June 2007 at 4.00pm.

PRESENT:

Miss V McEwan (Chair and Independent Member), Mr M Dulieu (Parish Council Representative), Mr D Fisher (Independent Member), Mr M Graham (Independent Member) and Councillors M Gollan and S C L Westrip.

Officers: C Potter (Monitoring Officer), I Forster (Assistant Chief Executive), J Bradley (Assistant Solicitor) and S Marshall (Democratic Services Assistant).

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor W Laverick.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 22 MARCH 2007

The Chair referred to Page 13 of the minutes of the meeting held 25 January 2007, which had been omitted at the previous meeting and queried if the Committee had any comments in relation to this page.

No comments were received and the minutes were agreed as being a correct record for the meeting held 25 January 2007.

RESOLVED: "That the minutes of the proceedings of the meetings held 25 January 2007 and 22 March 2007, copies of which had previously been circulated to each Member, be confirmed as being a correct record."

The Chair proceeded to sign the Minutes.

3 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

4 LETTER FROM STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND

The Chair advised that this matter would be considered under Item No.6 on the agenda, "New Model Code of Conduct for Members".

The Assistant Chief Executive entered the meeting at 4.05pm.

5 REPORT FROM 2006 ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

Consideration was given to the report from Mr Graham giving Members a summary of the various seminars he attended during the Annual Assembly.

Discussion ensued with regard to the points raised by Mr Graham including the possibility of the need to increase the membership of the Committee and the need to increase the number of Parish council representatives.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted."

At this point the Assistant Chief Executive introduced himself to the Committee.

6 NEW MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS

Consideration was given to the report of the Monitoring Officer notifying the Committee of the authorities within its remit which have, so far, adopted the new Model Code of Conduct under Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2007 and explaining the main changes brought about by the Code.

The Chair commented that it would be useful to have the new Code in various formats and advised the Committee that this could be found in Bulletin No. 33 and slides from the Road Show training event held in Newcastle on 12 June 2007.

Mr Fisher referred to Paragraph 6.7 of the report, which stated that the duty on a member to report a fellow member to the Standards Board for England where that member had a reasonably held belief of a breach by that other member had been removed from the Code. He queried if this was correct, as there no longer seemed to be an obligation to report a breach of the Code.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the old Code had a specific instruction for members to report a possible breach in writing to the Standards Board for England but that this legal obligation had now been removed.

The Chair queried if there were any training sessions to be held for Councillors on the new Code.

The Monitoring Officer advised that newly elected Members had received training as part of their induction and that discussions were being held with Parish Councils to arrange training for them.

Councillor Gollan entered the meeting at this point.

The Monitoring Officer went on to advise that at the time of writing the report, the District Council of Chester-le-Street had adopted the Code along with four of the twelve parish councils.

The Chair requested that the Monitoring Officer advise the Committee if any of the parish councils do not formally adopt the Code.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted and the Monitoring Officer report to the Committee if any of the parish Councils do not formally adopt the new Model Code of Conduct for Members."

7 REGISTER OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

Consideration was given to the report of the Monitoring Officer explaining the Register of Members' Interests and members' obligations to notify the Monitoring Officer under the new Code.

The Chair stated that the new Code requires a member to notify the Monitoring Officer, in writing, within 28 days of the adoption of the Code of details of the member's own personal interests. She advised that the Monitoring Officer had sent reminder letters to members who had not confirmed their interests within the stated 28 days and stated that although she thought this was good practice she felt that sending the reminder after the 28 days had expired was a little too late.

The Monitoring Officer advised that reminder letters were sent out on an annual basis in June and that it was incidental that this year the letter coincided with the adoption of the Code. He advised that the purpose of the letter was to serve as a reminder to members of the need to be compliant with the Code and to notify the Monitoring Officer of their interests.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted."

8 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Both the Chair and the Democratic Services Assistant circulated copies of Annual Reports of Standards Committees of other local authorities.

The Chair queried if the Committee had any preference as to style and content of the report.

Mr Dulieu stated that he preferred to the style of the report of Swindon Borough Council and that the content was precise and relevant to the public.

The Assistant Chief Executive advised that he also felt this was a good report to use as a model as it strikes a balance between the two reports, which the Monitoring Officer currently has prepared.

The Chair suggested that this matter be moved forward and that herself, Mr Fisher and the Monitoring Officer prepare a document in time for the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted and that the Chair, Mr Fisher and the Monitoring Officer prepare a report for the next meeting of the Committee."

9 TRAINING

The Chair referred to the training log sheet previously circulated to each member and queried who would be responsible for the upkeep of the information held on the form.

The Monitoring Officer advised that there was currently a lack of records of training received by members and that this was a draft form to be used to ascertain training members have received and which training is still required.

The Chair queried if there was any training available to members at present.

The Monitoring Officer advised that currently there was nothing he could recommend to members.

The Assistant Chief Executive advised that other councils in the region may have training sessions which would be available to members.

The Monitoring Officer advised that two places had been reserved for the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees and that the Committee would need to decide who would be attending the event.

Both the Chair and Mr Dulieu expressed an interest in attending the Annual Assembly.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted and that the Chair and Mr Dulieu attend the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees."

10 STANDARDS COMMITTEE WEB-PAGE

The Democratic Services Assistant advised that a web-page for the Committee had been designed and that she would require further information from the Committee as to the content of the page, such as pen portraits of the members and a brief description of the role and work of the Committee.

The Assistant Chief Executive suggested that the Committee's work programme be added along with a link to the Standards Board for England's website.

The Chair requested that members provide the Democratic Services Assistant with the suggested information.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted and Members provide the Democratic Services Assistant with pen portraits."

11 RECRUITMENT

The Monitoring Officer advised that at that night's Council meeting, lots were to be drawn to appoint a parish council representative to the Committee. With reference to the independent member vacancy, he advised that an advert was to be placed in the Evening Chronicle and a recruitment pack had been prepared. He also advised that the actual recruitment had not yet been outsourced due to unavailability during August and September.

The Assistant Chief Executive suggested exploring whether any other local councils would be willing to carry out the recruitment on the Council's behalf.

The Chair queried the timescale involved for the process.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the closing date for applications was Monday 6 August with a report to Council at the end of September.

RESOLVED; "That the Monitoring Officer explore the possibility of enlisting the services of another local council to carry out the recruitment process for the appointment of an Independent Representative."

12 BULLETIN NO.32

The Chair referred to Bulletin No. 32 and commented upon the useful information contained therein.

RESOLVED: "That the contents of Bulletin No. 32 be noted."

13 DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair referred to the Draft Work Programme, previously circulated to each member and queried whether the scheduled meetings of the Committee should also be included in the programme.

The Monitoring Officer suggested that the scheduled meeting dates should be kept separated from the programme of work and tasks to be carried out throughout the year. He also suggested that a work programme be established prior to deciding the frequency of Committee meetings.

Councillor Gollan referred to the inductions to be held for newly appointed representatives and queried whether it was to be held during the day or evening.

The Monitoring Officer advised that a mixture of sessions would be made available for training including "drop-in" sessions.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted."

14 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED: "That the next meeting be held on Thursday 23 August 2007 at 4.00pm."

The meeting terminated at 5.30pm.