

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET

Report of the meeting of Standards Committee held in the Conference Room No.4, Civic Centre, Newcastle Road, Chester-le-Street, Co Durham, DH3 3UT on Thursday, 20 December 2007 at 4.00 pm

PRESENT:

Miss Vera G McEwan, Mr Malcolm Graham, Mr Michael Dulieu, Ms Leigh Henderson, Mrs Gill Stephenson and Councillor William Laverick

Officers: C Potter (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), S Marshall (Democratic Services Assistant) and M Bradley (Democratic Services Assistant)

38. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence were received on behalf of J Armstrong and I Clarkson.

39. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 25 OCTOBER 2007

RESOLVED: "That the minutes of the meeting held 25 October 2007, copies of which had previously been circulated to each Member, be confirmed as being a correct record."

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

41. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to consider.

42. CODE OF CONDUCT

The Chair commented that she had seen an advertisement in a local newspaper from a parish council notifying that they had adopted the new Code of Conduct and queried if this would have been a statutory notice and if so, had the parish councils within Chester-le-Street published such a notice.

The Monitoring Officer advised that when formally adopting the Code, the parishes were required to place an advert notifying of such and the responsibility was that of the parish councils and not the district council.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted."

43. REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no comments made in relation to Register of Members' Interests.

44. TRAINING

The Chair queried if there was any forthcoming training which would be beneficial to the Committee.

The Monitoring Officer advised that he had prepared two power point presentations to be used to facilitate training for Members of the Committee and that suitable times for training needed to be arranged.

The Chair queried if there was to be induction training for the new Members of the Committee.

The Monitoring Officer advised that he planned to include this in the training to be given to all Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted."

45. CONSTITUTION AND FUNCTIONS OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Chair referred to an article in Bulletin 36 highlighting a new role for standards committees.

The Monitoring Officer advised that once the legislation came in to force the Council's Constitution would need to be amended.

Discussion ensued in relation possible forthcoming changes in legislation which may affect the committee and the need to ensure Members are provided with suitable training.

The Monitoring Officer provided Members with an update in relation to Local Government Re-organisation and the possibility of the formation of one Standards Committee for the new authority with various sub-committees.

He went on to advise that the Draft Annual Report of the Standards Committee for 2005-06 would be referred to the next meeting of the Council.

Mr Dulieu stated that Members of the Committee were finding it increasingly difficult to park at the civic centre when attending meetings of the Committee and enquired as to whether it would be possible for members to be provided with car park passes.

The Monitoring Officer advised that he would raise this matter with the Director of Development Services and report back to the Committee.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted and the Monitoring Officer enquire whether it be possible for Members of the Committee to be issued with car park passes."

46. PUBLIC AWARENESS

The Chair enquired whether the Committee's web-page on the Council's web site had been made "live" yet.

The Democratic Services Assistant advised that the page had been live for some time but with very limited information available as Members had still not provided her with pen portraits. She advised that this information was first requested in June 2008 and to date no pen portraits had been received.

The Chair requested that all Members provide the Democratic Services Assistant with this information as soon as possible.

Mrs Stephenson commented that other forms of making information about the Committee also be made available as not everybody had access to a computer.

The Chair advised that there had been issues in the past with articles being placed in District News and one of the main problems being lack of space.

The Monitoring Officer suggested liaising with parish councils to place information regarding the committee on their notice boards as being a way forward.

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

47. HEARINGS AND INVESTIGATIONS

The Monitoring Officer provided the Committee with a breakdown of the costs of the local hearing held earlier in the year and advised that there would also be the cost of the training to be provided to Pelton Parish Councillor McLean to be taken into consideration.

Councillor Laverick commented that if the individual or the parish council were to be charged for the training this would help re-iterate the message to members of parish councils that the code of conduct must be adhered to.

Mrs Stephenson commented that it also highlights the need for preventative measures such as training to prevent to need to hold such hearings.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted."

48. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED: "That the next meeting of the Committee be held on Thursday 21 February 2008 at 4.00pm."

The Chair conveyed seasons greeting to all those present and wished everybody a healthy and prosperous new year.

The meeting terminated at 4.55 pm