

Item 2

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor.

Tuesday
4th November 2003

Time : 2.00 p.m.

Present: Mr. L. Petterson (Chairman and Independent Member) and
Councillors Mrs. B. Graham and A. Gray

Parish/Town Council Member
Councillor J. Marr

Independent Member
Mr. I. Jamieson

Apologies: Councillors Mrs. L. Hovvels, G.M.R. Howe and J. Wayman, J.P.

ST.3/03 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10th June 2003 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

ST.4/03 TRAINING UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer gave details of the County Durham Ethical Standards Roadshows.

It was reported that two roadshows had already been held at Sedgefield Parish Hall on 18th September 2003 and Newton Aycliffe Leisure Centre on 29th October 2003. A further roadshow was to be held on 17th November 2003 in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Spennymoor.

The roadshows included information regarding the changes to the Standards Committee and its role in determining issues relating to Member conduct, the new powers to impose penalties and a whole range of changes to the standards and ethics framework. All Borough and Parish Councillors had received notification of the events via the North Eastern and Regional Employers Organisation, which was assisting in the administration support for the bookings.

It was pointed out that the events formed part of the Council's Member Development Programme, however, the two roadshows at Sedgefield Parish Hall and Newton Aycliffe Leisure Centre had not been particularly well attended.

The Committee suggested that it might be necessary for the Monitoring Officer to hold a further event in the new year, if the event on 17th November 2003 was not well attended.

RECOMMENDED: That consideration be given to organising a further Ethical Standards Roadshow in the new year.

ST.5/03 DETERMINATION OF STANDARDS ALLEGATIONS BY THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Consideration was given to a report of the Monitoring Officer regarding the above. (For copy see file of Minutes)

It was noted that the Government had made the first part of the Regulations under Section 66 of the Local Government Act 2000 to enable the Ethical Standards Officers of the Standards Board for England to refer allegations to the Standards Committee or a Sub-Committee of the Standards Committee for local determination, once the Ethical Standards Officer had completed an investigation of, and report on the allegation.

A further set of Section 66 Regulations would be made later in the year once the Local Government Bill was in force to allow an allegation to be referred down to the Monitoring Officer before investigation of the allegation so that the Monitoring Officer would arrange the investigation and report to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee.

It was pointed out that the Standards Board had issued guidance on procedures for dealing with referred allegations and a model procedure was detailed in the appendix to the report.

Members were given details of the types of issues that would be considered at local hearings and the range of sanctions that could be imposed.

The report also made reference to guidance received from the Standards Board regarding the Members' Allowances Scheme and the publicity of hearings.

RECOMMENDED: That the report be recommended to Council, for approval, of all consequential amendments to the Constitution, Members' Allowances Scheme and the remit of the Standards Committee.

ST.6/03 MEDIA PROTOCOL FOR STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Consideration was given to a report of the Monitoring Officer setting out a protocol for dealing with the media in respect of complaints and investigations considered by the Standards Committee. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was explained that the purpose of the protocol was to ensure a consistent approach and equality of treatment for any Member who was the subject of a complaint or investigation. It was designed to ensure consistency with existing protocols and compliance with relevant Acts and Codes of Practice.

With regard to the procedure for issuing a Standards Committee press release, it was reported that the Member, subject of the investigation, would be given copies of any release and statements as well as members of the Committee.

It was also noted that arrangements would be made for the Council's Press and Public Relations Officer to be in attendance at all hearings, with exception of those held in private under the personal circumstances category of exempt information, and for transcripts to be prepared of the proceedings.

RECOMMENDED: That the protocol be recommended for adoption by Council, as an addition to the Council's Constitution.

ST.7/03 CASE SBE2166.03 CONSIDERED BY THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND

Consideration was given to a summary outlining the conclusions reached in the above case. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members noted that the Ethical Standards Officer had found that no action needed to be taken.

RECOMMENDED: That the information be received.

CHAIRMAN OF MEETING HELD ON 17th May 2004

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Mrs. G. Garrigan, Spennymoor (01388) 816166, Ext. 4240.

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