

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Council Chamber,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Thursday,
6 April 2006

Time: 1.00 p.m.

Present: L. Petterson (Chairman) and

Councillors Mrs. B. Graham, A. Gray, G.M.R. Howe and J. Wayman J.P.

Parish/Town Council member

Councillor J. Marr (Spennymoor Town Council)

Independent Member

Mr. I Jamieson

Observers

Councillor Mrs. C. Sproat (Sedgefield Borough Council)

Councillor Mrs. E. Maddison (Spennymoor Town Council)

Apologies: Councillor Mrs. L. Hovvells

ST.24/05

AUDIT COMMISSION PRESENTATION

C. Andrew and S. Swan, Audit Commission, attended the meeting to give a presentation on Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and Standards of Conduct. (For copy see file of Minutes).

The presentation detailed the CPA process for District Councils, including the three key elements – corporate assessment, service assessment and the use of resources. It also included details on the new Code of Audit Practice that needed to be followed in identifying value for money, together with the scoring system and how each of the levels from 1 - 4 could be achieved.

Questions were raised as to how reaching the different levels was evaluated, specifically how Members and officers could demonstrate high standards of personal conduct to achieve level 4. It was explained that a body of evidence would be collated and subjectively viewed to award a suitable level.

It was also questioned how many local authorities had been awarded Level 4. It was reported that there were very few, however, the specific figure would need to be located from the database. It was agreed that the Committee would be informed of that figure at a later date.

ST.25/05

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members had no interests to declare.

ST.26/05**MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1st November 2005 were confirmed as a correct and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Specific reference was made to Minute no. ST.16/05 – An Analysis of the Current Trends in Allegations of Misconduct at National and Local Level – the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer explained that the Council was now in the position where its information on current trends could be collated. Members were informed that further reports of progress would be submitted to the Committee.

ST.27/05**ARRANGEMENTS FOR REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION**

Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Executive Officer, which detailed the need to continually review the Constitution to ensure that it reflected existing law and its operation continued to provide an efficient and effective framework in the delivery of the Council's aims and objectives. (For copy see file of Minutes).

The report informed Members of the proposed changes to the Constitution that had been made following meetings of the Constitutional Review Group and advice from the Council's Monitoring Officer.

RECOMMENDED:

1. *That the Constitution be amended accordingly.*
2. *That the amended version be published on the Council's website.*

ST.28/05**PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

Consideration was given to a report of the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer detailing the future changes that would be due to be implemented to the Code of Conduct. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members were informed of the proposed changes to the Code. It was believed by the Standards Board and the Government that they would ensure the Code would become clearer and simpler with more focus on important and serious issues of misconduct that would need to be addressed in raising public confidence in local government.

Concerns were raised by the Committee regarding a number of the proposed changes, specifically to the following points: -

- 3.8 – The range of interests, which would be required to be registered, to be reduced.
- 3.11 – Interests arising from membership of another public body, a charity or local pressure group, should not prevent members from discharging their representative role.
- 3.12 – The current £25 threshold for declaration of gifts and hospitality to be retained and the register of gifts and hospitality to be made public.
- 3.13 – Outside official duties, only unlawful conduct to be regarded as likely to bring the Member's office or Authority into disrepute.

It was suggested that the proposals outlined in the report be agreed with the above points being carefully monitored.

AGREED: That the report and future changes to the Code of Conduct be noted.

ST.29/05

PROPOSALS FOR AN INDEPENDENT MEMBER FORUM

Consideration was given to a report of the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer outlining the Council's position in relation to the establishment of an Independent Member Forum in the northern area. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members were informed of the proposal received from the Independent Members of Darlington Borough Council's Standard Committee to establish an Independent Members Forum within the North East.

It was explained that there was no such Forum within the area, however, the Standards Board had agreed that the establishment of more Forums would be beneficial. Discussions had also been held between the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, the Chief Executive Officer and Director of Resources who were in favour of the proposals.

The Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer suggested that a reply in favour of the establishment be sent to Darlington Borough Council.

Members of the Committee agreed, however, raised concerns and requested its development be monitored.

It was pointed out that if Members felt the Forum was unsuccessful then the Council could withdraw.

- AGREED :*
- 1. That the report be noted.*
 - 2. That a letter in favour of the establishment of the Forum be submitted to Darlington Borough Council.*
 - 3. That further reports be submitted to the Committee during the Forums development.*

ST.30/05

STANDARDS TRAINING UPDATE

Members were informed that three training events would be arranged for early Autumn 2006 essentially for Sedgefield Borough Council Members, however, invitations would be extended to Town and Parish Councils to discuss a number of issues with regard to Standards. Members would continue to be updated.

The Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer explained that the Standards Training event for Members, which had taken place on 4th April, 2006 had been a huge success. Attendance had been strong and from various local authorities from across the region. It was pointed out that feedback from those who took part had been excellent.

Members were also reminded that attendance to the Annual Standards Board Conference in Birmingham on 16th/17th October 2006 would need to be considered and agreed at Cabinet.

ST.31/05

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was explained that a report proposing the establishment of an Audit Committee was due to be considered by Cabinet. If agreed it was pointed out that a Standards Committee would need to be held before Annual Council which would be held on 19th May 2006.

It was agreed that Members of the Committee would be informed as soon as details were confirmed.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Miss. S. Billingham, Spennymoor 816166, Ext 4240, sbillingham@sedgefield.gov.uk