

Item 3

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Council Chamber,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Thursday,
2 November 2006

Time: 1.00 p.m.

Present: Councillor J. Wayman (Chairman pro temp) and
Councillors Mrs. B. Graham, A. Gray, Mrs. L. Hovvels, Mrs. C. Sproat

Spennymoor Town Council Member
Councillor J. Marr

Independent Member
Mr. I Jamieson

Apologies: Mr. L. Petterson

ST.9/06 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
Members had no interests to declare.

ST.10/06 MINUTES
The Minutes of the meeting held on 6th July, 2006 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

ST.11/06 ARRANGEMENTS OF REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION
Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Executive 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 and the delivery of the Council's aims and objectives. (For copy see file of Minutes).

The report informed Members of the proposed changes of the Constitution regarding: -

- Modifications to the officer delegations at Part 3c Officer Delegations made at the Request of Relevant Officers.

It was also pointed out that further inclusions and amendments would be proposed within a separate report to Council on 24th November to empower Licensing 2 Committee to exercise the powers of Licensing Authority in accordance with the Gambling Act 2005 including delegation of some of those powers to officers.

Concerns were raised regarding the current staffing levels within the Licensing Section and whether more staff would be needed to deal with the extra responsibilities.

- RECOMMENDED :*
- 1. That the Constitution be amended accordingly.*
 - 2. That the amended version be published on the Council's website.*
 - 3. That the proposal to introduce further amendments relating to the authority's functions under the Gambling Act, 2000 be noted.*

ST.12/06 SURVEY OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS CONDUCT IN PUBLIC LIFE 2006

Consideration was given to a report of the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer detailing the findings of a national quantitative study into Public Attitudes towards Conduct in Public Life. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members were informed that the survey had been commissioned by the Committee on Standards in Public Life to assess public attitudes, expectations and perceptions towards the behaviour of those in public life.

The survey aimed to explore people's overall perceptions of standards in public life and trust in public office-holders. It identified people's expectations and perceptions of standards of National Politicians, senior public officials, MPs and on voting in Parliament. It also included views on public sector recruitment practice, media scrutiny and the private lives of public officer-holders and public office-holders accountability.

AGREED : *That the report be noted and further similar reports be made annually.*

ST.13/06 AUTUMN TRAINING PROGRAMME UPDATE: REVIEW OF NEW ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

Members of the Committee were updated on the number of training events that had taken place.

The Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer explained that training events on Standards issues had been held on :-

- 28th September at the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Spennymoor
- 9th October at Great Aycliffe Town Council
- 23rd October at Sedgefield Town Council

The training included changes to the procedure and the new Code of Conduct together with the viewing of a DVD "Going Local" highlighting the process of preparing for and conducting a hearing at a local level.

It was explained that all Borough Council Members included co-opted Members, Town and Parish Councillors and their clerks and Members of Standards Committee were all invited to attend.

Members of the Committee pointed out how successful the training events had been.

The Committee was also invited to attend a future training event presented by Peter Keith Lucas on 27th June, 2007. Further details would be issued once confirmed.

ST.14/06

**FIFTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES:
STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND CONFERENCE: 16TH-17TH
OCTOBER 2006 - KEY MESSAGES GOING FORWARD**

The Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer updated the Committee of the recently held Fifth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees.

Members were informed that the training identified a number of changes to the Code of Conduct, including the following: -

- Personal interests
- Public service interest
- Prejudicial interests
- Election on a single issue
- Lobby and campaign groups
- Disclosure of confidential information
- Bullying
- Disrepute

The event identified the increase of investigations locally and highlighted how to conduct an effective investigation at a local level. It also included the changes to the Standards Board for England and the timetable for when decisions would be carried forward.

It was explained that further detailed reports would be issued in the future concentrating on: -

- Revised Code of Conduct and the Future Ethical Environment
- Case Review – Local Investigations, Appeals from Local Decisions, Directions, Bullying, Relationships between Council Leaders and Chief Executives, Officers
- Complaint Handling, work of the Standards Board
- Investigations – conducting and holding an effective hearing

Discussion was held regarding who made the initial decision of conducting a hearing at local level. The Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer explained that the matter would initially be submitted to the Standards Board who would decide how the investigation would continue. If there was to be a hearing by the local authority then the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer would then advise Members of the procedure to be followed.

ST.15/06

**REGISTER OF INTERESTS AND GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY: AUDIT
COMMISSION INSPECTION: 25TH JULY 2006**

The Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer informed Members that the Audit Commission had recently audited the Register of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality.

It was explained that they found the Register and the processes followed to be in order, with the management and availability of information all up to standard.

The Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer explained that Members were sent six monthly reminders in order to keep all information up-to-date. It was, however, pointed out that three monthly reminders would be beneficial. The Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer agreed to review the process.

ST.16/06

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8th February, 2007 at 1.00 p.m. in the Council Chamber, Council Officers, Spennymoor.

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, Tel 01388 816166 Ext 4240, sbillingham@sedgefield.gov.uk