

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Thursday,
7 February 2008

Time: 1.00 p.m.

Present: Councillor A. Gray (in the Chair) and
Councillors T. Hogan and Mrs. L. Hovvels

In Attendance: Councillor Mrs. A. Armstrong

Apologies: Councillor Mrs. E. Maddison
Mr. L. Petterson

Parish/Town Council member
Councillor J.Marr

Mr I. Jamieson (Independent Member)

ST.17/07 COUNCILLOR J. WAYMAN, J.P.
Members and the Monitoring Officer expressed their deep sadness at the loss of Councillor Wayman, who was a well-respected member of the Committee. Their thoughts were with his family at this difficult time.

ST.18/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
Members had no interests to declare.

ST.19/07 MINUTES
The Minutes of the meeting held on 1st November 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

ST.20/07 STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND: LEADER'S ETHICAL PLAN 2008 - 09
The Leader of the Council presented a report, which set out her mission and objectives for the Council in terms of policy approach to issues of member ethics, standards and conduct. (For copy see file of Minutes)

The report also provided information on Council performance on standards during 2007/08, and outlined the measures the Council had taken and intended to take to ensure the maintenance of high standards of behaviour, whilst ensuring a smooth transfer of functions to the new unitary authority.

Specific reference was made to the challenges that would be faced by the Council over the current year. These included the creation of a new

County-wide unitary authority and the need to ensure continuity in the provision of high quality guidance and advice to Members of the Borough Council and Parish and Town Councils.

Members' attention was also drawn to the changes to the ethical standards regime (including local assessment) resulting from the Local Government (Public Involvement in Health) Act 2007, and the expected increase and handling of cases at a local level.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

ST.21/07

**MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT - STANDARDS:
ATTENDANCE REVIEW 2007**

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

It was explained that it was a mandatory requirement for all members to attend at least one qualifying standards training event per year and attendance would be reported to the first Standards Committee of each year.

It was reported that several training events had been conducted throughout 2007. In total, 37 members attended training events during 2007, with some attending more than one event.

13 Councillors had failed to attend any of the training events and these members would be contacted by the Monitoring Officer.

Members were informed that two Borough Council members had attended an Annual Assembly of Standards Committees in Birmingham, which had focused on local regulation and the revised Code of Conduct.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

ST.22/07

**REVISED CODE OF CONDUCT - 28TH NOVEMBER 2007 -
EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE FEEDBACK**

Consideration was given to a report of the Solicitor to the Council analysing the evaluation questionnaire responses from a training event on the revised Code of Conduct on 28th November 2007. (For copy see file of Minutes)

It was reported that 10 members attended the training event, of which 7 completed the evaluation questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on three areas, which consisted of general information, a course satisfaction survey and comments. Feedback in these areas was positive.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

ST.23/07

**REGULATORY COMMITTEES - DECISION PROCESS - 29TH
NOVEMBER 2007 - EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE FEEDBACK**

Consideration was given to a report of the Solicitor of the Council analysing the evaluation questionnaire responses from a training event on

Regulatory Committees held on 29th November 2007. (For copy see file of Minutes)

Members were informed that the event was attended by 7 members, who all completed the questionnaire. Despite the low attendance, which was possible a result of members' other responsibilities concerning Local Government Reorganisation, comments on the quality of the training were consistently good and feedback was positive.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

ST.24/07

NATIONAL AUDIT COMMISSION SURVEY - WHAT'S THE SCORE

Consideration was given to a report of the Solicitor to the Council outlining the findings of the national self-assessment survey carried out by the Audit Commission. (For copy see file of Minutes)

It was explained that the survey had been created by the Audit Commission in conjunction with the Standards Board for England and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), and is one element of a four-part Ethical Governance Diagnostic toolkit.

Up to July 2007, 3998 individual Council members and senior officers from 44 Councils across the Country had completed the survey. Over 170 Councils has used at least one part of the toolkit. All responses to the survey were anonymous in order to ensure accuracy.

The findings were encouraging, however the necessity of training in order to keep up to date with developments was stressed.

AGREED: That the findings detailed in the report be noted.

ST.25/07

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT TRENDS IN ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL 2006 - 2007

Consideration was given to a report of the Solicitor to the Council, which analysed the current trends in allegations of misconduct, submitted to the Standards Board, both nationally and locally. (For copy see file of Minutes)

It was reported that since 2006 the Standards Board had received 3549 complaints nationally, compared with 3836 during the same period in 2005/2006. Over half (62%) of the allegations had been received by members of the public, with those coming from fellow councillors at 31%.

Locally, 11 complaints were submitted to the Standards Board against several local Councillors. Despite some of these complaints involving multiple allegations, only one was referred to an Ethical Standards Officer for investigation.

AGREED:

- 1. That the general trends in complaints of misconduct investigated at a national and local level be noted.*
- 2. That further reports be submitted to Standards Committee on an annual basis.*

ST.26/07**REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION**

Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Executive detailing proposed changes to the Council's Constitution to ensure that it reflected existing law and its operation continued to provide an efficient and effective framework for delivering the Council's aims and objectives. (For copy see file of Minutes)

It was pointed out that since the report had been prepared a request had been received to include an additional officer delegation in respect of the Selective Licensing Scheme that was to be introduced.

AGREED: That Council be recommended to approve the amendments set out in the Appendix and direct the Council's Monitoring Officer

- a) to amend the Constitution accordingly and make all necessary and consequential amendments and*
- b) to publish an amended version on the Council's website.*

ST.27/07**REVIEW OF CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING POLICY**

Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Executive concerning the above. (For copy see file of Minutes)

Members' attention was drawn to paragraphs 3.10 to 3.12, which set out the findings of the review.

It was reported that the policy had been invoked only once since introduced in April 2001 and had operated effectively in that case.

AGREED: That the findings of the review of the Confidential Reporting Policy outlined in paragraphs 3.10 to 3.12 be noted.

ST.28/07**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To be arranged.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Miss. J. Stubbs, Tel 01388 816166 Ext 4508, juliestubbs@sedgefield.gov.uk