

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Thursday,
3 July 2008

Time: 1.00 p.m.

Present: Councillor L. Petterson (Chairman) and
Councillor A. Gray

Parish/Town Council member
Councillor R.S. Fleming

Independent Member
Mr. B. Argyle

Apologies: Councillors T. Hogan, Mrs. L. Hovvells and Mrs. E. Maddison
Councillor J. Marr (Parish/Town Council Member)
Mr. I. Jamieson (Independent Member)

ST.1/08

MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7th February 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

ST.2/08

NEW MEMBERS

Mr. Petterson welcomed the two new Members to the Standards Committee: Mr. Brian Argyle – Co-opted Independent Member and Councillor RS. Fleming – Parish Member. He thanked them both for attending.

ST.3/08

THE ROLE AND MAKE UP OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE GUIDANCE

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

The report set out the role and make-up of the Standards Committee based upon guidance issued under the Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008.

Members were informed that since May 2008 Standards Committees have had the responsibility for conducting initial assessments to decide which complaints to investigate. This new responsibility had resulted in changes to the structure of the Committee. These changes included the requirement to have two appointed Parish or Town Council representatives and at least 25% of the Committee membership as Independent Members.

Attention was drawn to Section 3.7 of the report which covered the appointment of Sub-Committees to assess new complaints and review decisions to take no action on a complaint.

AGREED : That the report be noted.

ST.4/08

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LOCAL ASSESSMENT OF COMPLAINTS REGARDING MEMBERS' CONDUCT AND CHANGES TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE EFFECTIVE FROM THE 8TH MAY 2008

Consideration was given to a report of the Solicitor to the Council regarding legislation that had come into force and the methods of dealing with complaints. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was reported that the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 had received Royal Assent on 30th October 2007. As a result of this legislation the three distinct roles for Standards Committees in relation to complaints about Member conduct were :

- Receiving and assessing complaints
- Reviewing local assessment decisions
- Conducting hearings following an investigation into a complaint.

Members were informed that helpful information and guidance had been published on the Standards Board website.

It was reported that for the purpose of Sub-Committees, the Standards Committee would be used as a "Member pool" and that the Monitoring Officer would appoint Sub-Committee Members as and when required from that pool to constitute relevant Sub-Committees. This would allow for the identification of cases where there may be interest.

D. Rackstraw, the Principal Assistant Solicitor, then asked Members for guidance on how many complaints should be considered by each meeting of the Sub-Committee.

- AGREED :*
1. *That the report be noted.*
 2. *That no more than three complaints would be considered at each meeting of the Standards Sub-Committee.*

ST.5/08

SATISFACTION WITH THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND AND ATTITUDES TO THE ETHICAL ENVIRONMENT: QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION FOLLOWING QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

Consideration was given to a report of the Solicitor to the Council regarding satisfaction with the Standards Board for England and attitude to the ethical environment. (For copy see file of Minutes).

The report summarised the results of qualitative research by the Standards Board for England. Six standard focus groups and one on-line focus group had been held countrywide, which captured the views of Monitoring Officers, Standards Committee Chairs and Members, Councillors and Parish Councillors.

AGREED : *That the report be received and noted.*

ST.6/08

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 30th October, 2008 at 1.00 p.m.

ST.7/08

COMPLAINTS

D. Rackstraw informed Members that details of how people could make a complaint, the complaint form and protocol had been posted on the Council website.

A query was raised concerning the reporting of Sub-Committee deliberations on the website. It was unclear as to whether all complaints assessments would be reported, or only those where investigations had taken place. D. Rackstraw agreed to check and report back to the next meeting.

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