

Item 2

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Thursday,
30 October 2008

Time: 1.00 p.m.

Present: Mr. B. Argyle (in the Chair) and
Councillors A. Gray and T. Hogan

Parish/Town Council members

Councillors R.S. Fleming, J. Marr and D. Waters

Apologies: Councillors Mrs. L. Hovvels, Ms. I. Jackson and Mrs. E. Maddison
Mr. L. Peterson and Mr. I. Jamieson (Independent Members)

ST.8/08 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd July 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

ST.9/08 NEW MEMBERS

Mr. Argyle formally welcomed the two new Members to the Standards Committee: Councillors Ms. I. Jackson and Councillor D. Waters - Parish Member.

ST.10/08 AN ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT TRENDS IN ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL 2007/08

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

The report analysed the current trends in allegations of misconduct submitted to the Standards Board relating to misconduct by elected co-opted and independent members of local authorities for the period 1st April 2007 to 31st March 2008.

It was reported that nationally the Standards Board had received 3,642 complaints since April 2007, compared to 3549 during the same period in 2006/2007, averaging at approximately 300 a month. 67% of the allegations received were from members of the public and 27% by fellow Councillors.

Fourteen complaints had been submitted against several local Councillors, however, some involved multiple allegations and it was important to recognise that no adverse implications should be inferred from the fact, merely that allegations had been made.

AGREED : That the report be noted.

ST.11/08

STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND - ANNUAL REVIEW 2007/08

Consideration was given to a report of the Solicitor to the Council regarding the changing role of the Standards Board and the new responsibilities of local authorities for the assessment of complaints. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members were made aware of some of the key achievements of the Standards Board, including ensuring that Monitoring Officers and Standards Committee members were informed of the new Code of Conduct and its adoption date. Roadshows explaining the new Code and the new local framework had been attended by some Members.

Concern was expressed over false allegations being made against Councillors, which could create public perception issues and suffering for the Councillor concerned. There would also be financial implications for the investigation procedures. Members were informed that the Assessment Hearings needed to decide which complaints were severe enough to require investigation. Other options, such as training, were available to deal with less severe cases.

AGREED : That the report be noted.

ST.12/08

STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND - QUARTERLY STATISTICS - QUARTER 1

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

The report covered the size and composition of Standards Committees, sources of complaints and referral decisions. Members of the public and fellow Councillors still remained the most frequent sources of complaints.

A query was raised regarding the composition of the Standards Committee in the Unitary Authority. The Monitoring Officer informed Members that with the 109 Parish/Town Councils within the County (which were the sources of most complaints) the new Authority would need to be equipped to deal with a large number of complaints. The new Standards Committee was likely to have a larger number of Members and Parish/Town representatives as a result of the large span of the Authority. The possibility of establishing sub-committees was also raised, which would be a political issue for the new Council to consider.

AGREED : That the report be noted.

ST.13/08

LOCAL ASSESSMENT OF COMPLAINTS - UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report of the Solicitor to the Council updating Members on complaints that had been received since local assessment came into force on 8th May 2008. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members were informed that eight complaint forms had been returned, some involving a complaint against more than one Councillor.

The report gave information on the types of complaints made and the decisions made by the Assessment Sub-Committee. One request to review a “no action” decision had been received and considered at a Review Sub-Committee on 23rd October 2008.

AGREED : That the report be noted.

ST.14/08

PUBLICATION OF DECISIONS OF ASSESSMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

At the previous meeting a query had been raised regarding the reporting of Sub-Committee deliberations on the website.

Members were informed that the Standards Board only reported on those cases that had been investigated. Publication was not a legal requirement and, as the Council was to be abolished in March, it was not considered appropriate to begin now.

ST.15/08

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 5th February 2009 at 1.00 p.m.

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

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