



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a MEETING held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE on THURSDAY 9 OCTOBER 2003.

PRESENT: Mr RL Tickell (Chairman), Mr PCB Coleman, Mr A Gooch, Mr P McGuigan and Mrs P Rugg

Mr JB Osborn and Mr IC West also attended the meeting.

79. **Membership** The Director of Corporate Services reported the membership of the Committee.

80. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr G Thompson.

81. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Resolved: To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2003, subject to confirmation that the view "that the provisions of any indemnity should include co-opted members" be included in the response to the ODPM on the recent consultation paper (Minute No. 75).

82. **Public Participation**

Mr Ian West, a member of the County Council, asked questions regarding the provision of legal advice for elected members, the right of members to the services of the Ombudsman, the human rights implications of being refused such services and the Consultation Paper entitled "Indemnities for Members and Officers." The Chairman responded to the questions and advised Mr West that a written response would be sent to him in due course.

83. **Presentation by the Ombudsman**

The Committee received a presentation by Mr Stephen Purser from the Local Government Ombudsman's office based in Coventry. The presentation covered the following issues:

- Role of the Ombudsman
- Volume and Type of Complaints
- Jurisdiction of the Ombudsman
- How Complaints are investigated
- Persistent Complainants

- Maladministration, Injustice and putting things right
- Remedying Injustice

Members also took the opportunity to obtain answers to questions about the complaints procedure which they found very helpful. Mr Purser informed members that the Ombudsman produced an annual letter regarding complaints which the Standards Committee might wish to consider at a future meeting.

The Committee went on to discuss how local members could be better informed about complaints within their particular area of the County.

Resolved: That the dissemination of information to local members regarding complaints be considered at a future meeting.

84. **Appointment of Substitute Members of Committees**

The Committee received a report by the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer. The report advised members on the steps to be taken in the light of the referral of the amendment of the leader of the Independent Group from the Council meeting on 15 July 2003.

Resolved: To recommend the County Council to approve the amendment to the substitution scheme set out in the report, in order to avoid small political groups being disadvantaged in the exercise of the substitution scheme.

85. **Local Determination of Misconduct Allegations**

The Monitoring Officer reported back on the recent training seminar regarding the local determination of misconduct allegations which had been held in Devizes on 26 September 2003. Three members of the Committee and three members of staff had attended the seminar. All agreed that the day had been very useful, particularly the morning session which had covered the Code of Conduct, complaints and the hearing of misconduct allegations.

Resolved: To set aside an hour following the December meeting of the Committee to undertake some training on the local determination of misconduct allegations.

86. **Annual Report**

The Committee received a final draft copy of the Standards Committee Annual Report covering the first two years of its work. Members were happy with the layout and content of the report and confirmed that it should be published before the next meeting in November, subject to the approval of the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.

It was hoped that the Annual Report would receive a wide distribution to include members of the public and the Committee agreed that copies should be made available in public libraries.

Resolved: To approve the format of the annual report subject to the inclusion of the recent press release on the work of the Standards Committee in relation to the Constitution.

(Duration of meeting: 3.00pm – 5.00pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Marie Todd of Democratic and Members' Services direct line (01225) 713011 or e-mail marietodd@wiltshire.gov.uk.
Press enquiries to Communications, direct line (01225) 713114/713115.