

WEST WILTSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the: STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Held on: **WEDNESDAY 23 APRIL 2008**

Held in: **THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, BRADLEY ROAD
TROWBRIDGE**

Present:

District Council Representatives: Cllrs Clark, Ezra, and Martindale

External Representatives: Tony Frost (Chairman) and Gerry Robson

Town/Parish Representatives: Cllr Wyeth

Also present:

Officers: Monitoring Officer (TD), Solicitor (SMS), and Member Support Officer (SRS)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Kinder and March, and from Bruce Epsley.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN

There were none.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of 12 February 2008 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

5. SBE BULLETIN

The Solicitor (SMS) introduced the written report on the Standards Board for England's (SBE) February 2008 Bulletin. Together with the Monitoring Officer (TD), she answered questions from Members on the contents of the Bulletin and its implications for the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the February Bulletin were noted by the Committee.

6. UPDATE ON LOCAL ASSESSMENT

The Solicitor (SMS) explained that the paper included in the agenda for the Committee had been superseded by new regulations, and drew Members' attentions to the paper tabled at the meeting summarising these. In particular, that this Committee must establish three sub-committees: one to undertake an initial assessment of any complaints received; a second to review the first assessment decision upon request; and a third to conduct any hearings.

In the event of allegations being made against a Councillor, the Monitoring Officer has a duty to produce a report for the sub-committee containing everything which has been brought to his attention and is material, as soon as possible.

When full guidance is received from the SBE, a summary will be circulated.

Clarification will also be sought from the SBE as to whether the suspension of a Councillor is set-aside once an appeal is made.

The Chairman thanked the Solicitor for providing a summary for the meeting despite having just received the contents of the Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008.

7. PROGRESS ON COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

The Monitoring Officer (TD) introduced his report updating the Committee on progress with the appointment of one additional independent member and two additional town and parish representatives.

The Council had appointed Mrs Jacqueline Smith as an Independent Member on the Standards Committee at its meeting on 9 April 2008. However, it was subsequently established that, as a parish clerk, Mrs Smith was ineligible to serve in this capacity. Mr Dennis Johnson, who was also interviewed, has kindly agreed to take up the position. Mr Johnson's appointment will be confirmed along with that of other members of the Committee at the Annual Council meeting on 14 May 2008.

A ballot is being held of all District Councillors to determine which town and parish representatives are appointed.

The local assessment system will then be put into effect here after 8 May 2008. Each sub-committee must have an independent member as well as an independent chairman. If possible, a brief description/CV of the new members will be published. Membership of the sub-committees could be reviewed after a minimum of six months.

8. TRAINING ON LOCAL ASSESSMENT

The Solicitor (SMS) reported that two-part training is required for members of the Committee: firstly on the guidance on local assessment to be issued by the SBE, secondly in-depth training on the Code of Conduct. Such training will take an estimated two and a half hours.

It was agreed that training can be held on Thursday 5 June 2008. This will also be the first formal meeting of the Committee, the main business of which will be to appoint members to the three sub-committees.

For those unable to attend on this date, individual or further group training may be provided.

9. PREPARATIONS FOR ONE COUNCIL

The Monitoring Officer (TD) reported that preparatory work is continuing for the unitary authority including Standards, which will come under the Resources Directorate.

10. UPDATES FROM MEMBERS

The Chairman reported on two training events he had attended. Unfortunately some of the information provided at the time is now out of date. However, he asked members to note that 'the bar was set quite high' for when matters should be investigated by the Standards Committee.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 5 June 2008 at 6.30pm in the 8trium, at the Council Offices, Bradley Road, Trowbridge. Refreshments will be provided from 6.00pm.

This meeting is to be followed by a training session from approximately 7.00pm.

(7.00pm – 8.35pm)

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