

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Thursday 18th October, 2007 at 6.00pm
in Committee Room 4 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

The Bishop of Dudley (Independent Chairman)
Councillors Ms. Craigie, J. Davies, Fraser-Macnamara, Kettle, Ms.
Partridge and Tyler; Miss L. Smith

OFFICERS

The Director of Law and Property and Mr J Jablonski (Directorate of Law
and Property).

8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No member made a declaration of interest, in accordance with the
Members' Code of Conduct, in respect of any matter to be considered at
this meeting.

9 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 28th
June, 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed.

10 MATTER ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

It was reported that in connection with the Members' Allowances Scheme
(Minute 7) the three political group leaders on the Council had yet to
meet to consider the matter.

11 ANNUAL REPORT: MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT

A report of the Monitoring Officer was submitted on the Annual Report on
the operation of Members' Code of Conduct.

The Monitoring Officer, in introducing the report, commented in particular on the lower number of complaints that had been made since the last Annual Report had been submitted and the apparent growing recognition by the Standards Board for England that comments made in the heat of the moment or in the rough and tumble of political life should not normally be regarded as a breach of the Code. As this had not always been the case, it was considered that the threshold for launching an investigation into isolated injudicious comments had been raised.

Reference was also made to a DVD produced by the Standards Board for England on local investigations and local determinations which would be viewed by this Committee at its meeting in January. Thereafter, a further training seminar for Members would be arranged for them to view the new DVD.

Arising from consideration of the Action Points for 2007/8, at paragraphs 17 to 21 of the report submitted, particular comments were made on the changes to the handling of complaints of alleged breaches to the Code which would mean that all complaints would initially be reported direct to the local Standards Committee, rather than the Standards Board for England which would impact on the workload of this Committee. In this connection, it was considered that the new arrangements should be in place by April, 2008, although new regulations had yet to be received. Arising from preliminary consideration of the arrangements for the hearing of complaints post-April, 2008, it was considered that there should be an increase in the number of independent Members on the Committee, from two to three, so as to better facilitate the likely new arrangements.

Further consideration would be given to the new arrangements following receipt of the regulations and training would be arranged for Members in the carrying out of their new role.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, in particular, the Action Points for 2007/8, set out in paragraphs 17 to 21 of the report, be noted and endorsed and that the Annual Report: Members' Code of Conduct, be referred to the Council for approval, together with a recommendation that the number of independent Members serving on the Committee be increased from two to three in the light of the new arrangements for the local handling of complaints to be introduced from April, 2008.

Arising from the introduction given by the Monitoring Officer to the content of the report submitted, particular consideration was given to paragraph 5 of the report which referred to the results of a number of research projects commissioned in 2006/7. These suggested that there were three broad types of Standards Committees ranging from a lap dog committee, which was ineffective, often due to lack of resources or political interference, a watchdog committee which fulfilled the statutory role, keeping an eye on member conduct and overseeing operation of the Code and a guide dog committee that went further, seeing itself not just as a regulatory body, but as a champion of ethical conduct, responsible for helping and supporting members in raising standards. It was considered that this Committee was currently between the second and third types of committee.

It was further considered that to help the Committee move to being more of a guide dog committee an item be placed on a future agenda of the Committee to enable consideration to be given as to how this could be achieved.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted, on the Standards Board for England: 2006/7 Annual Review, be noted and endorsed.
- (2) That the Monitoring Officer be requested to arrange for an item to be placed on a future agenda of this Committee to enable consideration to be given to this Committee becoming more of a guide dog committee as defined in paragraph 5 of the report submitted.

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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

A report of the Monitoring Officer was submitted on the Annual Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life 2006

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, on the Annual Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life 2006, be noted.

The meeting ended at 6.40 p.m.

CHAIRMAN