

## WEST WILTSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### MINUTES

Minutes of the:           **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Held on:                   **THURSDAY 20 MAY 2004**

Held at:                   **OCTAGON SUITE, BRADLEY ROAD, TROWBRIDGE**

Present:

District Council           Ernie Clark and Eli Manasseh  
Representatives:

External                   Tony Frost (Chair)  
Representatives:

Town/Parish Council      William Parks and Horace Prickett  
Representatives:

Also present:             Councillors Julian Bower and Bill Viles

Officers:                 Corporate Director (PW), Legal Services Manager and  
Member Support Manager

#### **68     APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Baker, Keith West and Margaret Ellwood.

#### **69     MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **70     DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **71     ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIR**

##### Standards Board for England

The Chair informed members that he had received the second issue of the Standards Board for England (SBE) newsletter, Standards Committee News. Copies were available on the SBE web site for those members who had not received a copy.

## Standards Seminar, Bristol City Council 30 June 2004

The Chair advised members that Bristol City Council were running a Standards Seminar on 30 June to explore all aspects of the Code of Conduct. The seminar was aimed at officers and members of Standards Committees. Normally the Council would seek to nominate the Chair and Portfolio Holder to attend, however due to the low delegate costs the Chair explained that he would like to extend the invitation to all members of the Committee.

The Legal Services Manager would circulate the Seminar details to all members of the Committee.

## Bill Parks - Last Meeting of the Committee

The Chair explained that this would be the last meeting of the Committee before elections were held to appoint a Town Council representative to serve on the Standards Committee. The Chair thanked Bill for his work over the last twelve months.

The Legal Services Manager explained that each of the Town Councils would be invited to nominate one member to serve on the Standards Committee, with a deadline for nominations of 6 June. Ballot papers would then be issued to all members of the Council and would need to be returned by 18 June.

## **72 REVIEW OF PROTOCOL ON MEMBER/OFFICER RELATIONS**

Consideration was given to a report presented by Peter Woodcock, Corporate Director which gave details of a review of the protocol on Member/Officer relations following a consultation exercise with members and staff.

Councillor Bower informed the Committee that a seminar had been held for members to consider a review of the Member Officer Protocol. The consensus was that the staff were generally very helpful, that members should show the respect they would expect to be shown themselves and that the complaints must have related to a very small minority of members. As a result of discussions between senior officers and Councillor Bower, it was proposed that such complaints should be referred to the member of staff's Corporate Team member in the first instance. This would not, however, prevent a member of staff channelling their complaint directly to the Standards Committee/or Standards Board for England (SBE).

The Corporate Director advised members that it had been suggested that there be a similar process for complaints against members of staff by members, whereby complaints were channelled through the appropriate member of Corporate Team.

The Chair was concerned to ensure that, where it was acknowledged that the complaint involved a breach of the Code of Conduct, officers observed the duty to report the matter to the SBE.

Councillor Bower also referred to a further outcome of the seminar, which identified the need for joint member/officer training, paying particular regard to planning.

With reference to the training, members suggested that the programme should also be made available to Town/Parish Council members. The Corporate Director explained that numbers might make such arrangements difficult and suggested that the training be made available to the Town/Parish clerks who would then be able to share information with their Council members.

- RESOLVED:**
- (i) That the Member/Officer Relations protocols is confirmed, subject to the inclusion of a procedure to deal with complaints that the protocol and/or the Member Code of Conduct has been breached. A draft procedure is to be submitted to the next meeting of the Standards Committee.
  - (ii) That the Committee considers raising member and officer awareness of the Members' Code of Conduct and the protocol on member/officer relations, and in particular, to ensure that the Committee's recommendations and the report are circulated to all members and officers.
  - (iii) That the Committee supports further training activities in the area of planning and that an invitation be extended to Town/Parish Council clerks.

## **73 INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS**

Consideration was given to a report presented by Gareth Owens, Legal Services Manager regarding which set out details of proposed legislation which enabled monitoring officers to investigate alleged breached of the Code of Conduct and provided proposed responses to those questions raised by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

- RESOLVED:** That the response to those questions raised by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, set out in Appendix 2 to the report be approved.

## **74 MEDIA GUIDELINES**

Consideration was given to a report presented by Gareth Owens, Legal Services Manager which set out details of media guidelines which had been prepared by the Corporate Communications Policy Project Group.

- RESOLVED:** That the media guidelines set out in the Appendix to the report be approved as working guidelines for inclusion in the Constitution and that Cabinet be informed accordingly.

**75 ANNUAL REPORT**

Consideration was given to a report prepared by Gareth Owens, Legal Services Manager, which presented the final draft of the Committee's report.

Members drew the Legal Services Manager's attention to a number of amendments to the report.

**RESOLVED:** That, subject to amendments raised at the meeting, the annual report, as previously circulated to members of the Committee, be approved.

**76 WORK PROGRAMME FOR STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Committee considered the work programme for the next four meetings.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

**77 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Update on Complaints

The Legal Services Manager informed members that there were two complaints regarding District Council members which had been referred to the Standards Board for England (SBE). One was an ongoing matter, previously advised to the members, which involved two District Councillor. The SBE was not dealing with this complaint as a priority.

The second was a new complaint, which the Legal Services Manager had recently referred to the Ethical Standards Officer at the SBE.

There were currently no complaints about Town/Parish Councillors.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday, 14 July 2004 at 7pm in the Octagon Suite at the Council Offices, Bradley Road, Trowbridge.

These minutes were prepared by Mandy Arnold,  
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The meeting started at 7pm and finished at 8.30pm.

Chairman's signature .....

Date .....