

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Standards Committee Wednesday, 25 May 2011 Committee Room 1, Runcorn Town Hall

Present: Mr B. Badrock (Chairman), Parish Councillor Mr B Allen, Mr A. Luxton, Mrs A. Morris, and Councillors Browne, Parker, Redhead, Swain and Wainwright

Apologies for Absence: Mr R. Garner

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Reaney and A. Scott

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE COMMITTEE

		<i>Action</i>
STC1	APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR 2011/12 The Operational Director, Legal and Democratic Services, Mr Reaney, opened the meeting and invited nominations for the appointment of chair and deputy chair for the municipal year 2011/12. RESOLVED: That Mr W Badrock be appointed chair and Mr A Luxton be appointed deputy chair of the Standards Committee for the 2011/12 municipal year. MR BADROCK IN THE CHAIR	
STC2	MINUTES The minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2011, having been printed and circulated, were signed as a correct record.	
STC3	STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Policy and Resources which summarised the work of the Committee in the last municipal year.	

The Committee noted that there had been four meetings in 2010/11. Details of membership and the role of the Committee were outlined in the report. During the year, Members had received a report on the local application of the systems for Declaration of Interests by Members in order to maintain the values of good governance and acceptable behaviour. In addition, the Committee received and considered guidance from Standards for England on the benefits and disadvantages of social networking and blogging and on the role of Members of more than one authority in relation to the Code.

In addition, the Committee had received regular updates of information from Standards for England and digests of cases that had been heard in other authorities.

It was noted that a revised version of the Members Code of Conduct had been expected during the year. However, following the outcome of the General Election in May 2010, the new Government had indicated its intention to do away with a Statutory Code of Conduct and the need for local Standards Committees. No complaints had been received during the year which required the consideration of the Assessment Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and referred to Council for information.

Operational
Director, Legal
and Democratic
Services

STC4 RECENT CASE SUMMARIES FROM STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Policy and Resources which outlined recent decisions in cases where a breach of the Code of Conduct had been alleged in other authorities.

The Committee noted and discussed the contents of cases from Cheshire East Council, Broughton and Dalby Parish Council, Basingstoke and Dean Borough Council and Wyre Borough Council. Of particular note, and based on the information provided, the Committee commented on the apparent inconsistency of decisions in each of the cases presented.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

STC5 REPORT ON DECLARATION OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Policy and Resources on the local application of the systems for declarations of interests by Members in order to maintain the values of good governance and ethical behaviour.

Members were reminded that the second annual report on Declarations of Interest by Members was considered at the meeting on 26 May 2010. This highlighted the importance of integrity in local government and provided guidance on the definition of both personal and personal and prejudicial interests. It was noted that the Council had a challenging culture of declaration of interests for which prime responsibility rested with individual Members. However, the report outlined how the practical expression of the culture operated, which included a reminder at the start of each meeting, guidance available from the Monitoring Officer, the annual opportunity to update a Declaration form as well as engaged involvement by the Standards Committee.

The Committee also noted that all newly elected Members received advice on this requirement as part of the Council's Member Induction Programme which took place on 11 May 2011.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

STC6 THE FUTURE OF STANDARDS

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Policy and Resources on the future of the Standards regime.

At its meeting on 5 January 2011, the Committee was advised that Standards for England, the National Code of Conduct and the requirement to have Standards Committees, were to be abolished by the Localism Bill. The Bill was due to have its Report stage and third reading in the House of Commons in May 2011 although at the time of the meeting, the outcome was not known.

The Bill contained a new general duty for relevant Authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and voting Co-opted Members. Authorities could adopt, change and withdraw voluntary Codes of Conduct and publicise them if they wished.

However, it was noted that there would be no requirement for an authority to maintain a Standards Committee or Code of Conduct. To this end, the Monitoring Officer advised Members that a paper dealing with options would be prepared for consideration by Council.

In discussions the Committee considered the following:

- a cross-boundary local authority approach to the Standards regime and Code of Conduct;
- the importance of the promotion of ethical standards by all those in public service;
- the valuable contribution to the work of the Committee made by Independent Members; and
- the need for consultation with Parish Councils on any future Standards regime or Code of Conduct which the Borough Council may adopt.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 4.10 p.m.