

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Standards Committee Wednesday, 7 November 2012 The Board Room - Municipal Building, Widnes

Present: Councillors P. Lloyd Jones (Chairman), M. Bradshaw, Cole, McDermott, Parker, Woolfall and Mr A. Luxton (Co-optee)

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Gerrard, J. Lowe, Wainwright and Mrs A Morris (Co-optee)

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Reaney and A. Scott

Also in attendance: Professor D Norman, Mr R Radley and Mrs D Howard

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE COMMITTEE

		<i>Action</i>
STC6	<p>MINUTES</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2012, having been printed and circulated, were signed as a correct record.</p> <p>In response to a discussion on the adoption of the Members' Code of Conduct, the Monitoring Officer advised that as an evolving document, the Code would be kept under review, and could be refined if it proved necessary in due course.</p> <p>In addition, Members discussed a possible alteration to the starting time of future meetings, and it was agreed that the Chairman would consult with Councillor Gerrard about his availability to attend meetings, given the potential clash of timings with his school transport contract responsibilities.</p>	
STC7	<p>OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY ON PERSONAL INTERESTS - DCLG GUIDANCE</p> <p>The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director, Policy and Resources, which outlined the present Government guidance which supported the declaration of interests requirements for Members.</p>	

The Committee noted that the previous Standards regime came to an end in April 2012, with the abolition of the Standards Board for England. In July 2012, Halton Borough Council adopted a new Code of Conduct for Members, which formed part of the Council's Constitution document.

The Committee was advised that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had issued some supportive guidance in relation to declarations of interest. The document, attached at Appendix 1, was entitled "Openness and Transparency on Personal Interests – A Guide for Councillors", gave Members basic practical information on how to be open and transparent on personal interests, and was designed to help Councillors, including Parish Councillors, following the introduction of new standards arrangements by the Localism Act 2011.

Members discussed the adoption of a Code by Parish Councils and the Monitoring Officer confirmed the current position that all six Parish Councils had adopted the same version of the Borough Council Code. There was some further consideration on the role of the Parish Clerk and whether they would be bound by the Code. In response, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that Clerks were not required to abide by the Code in the same way that Parish Councillors were. The Committee asked that a report on the role of Parish Clerks be brought to the next meeting for information.

In addition, Members asked for confirmation that all of Halton Borough Council's Elected Members had submitted and signed their Register of Interests following adoption of the Code in July 2012. In response, the Monitoring Officer advised that there was one Registration which remained outstanding.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report be noted;
- 2) a report on Parish Clerks and their role in relation to their adopted Code of Conduct be brought to the next meeting; and
- 3) the Committee place on record their concern about the Members' Register of Interest which remained outstanding.

Operational
Director, Legal
and Democratic
Services

STC8 THE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director, Policy and Resources, on the recent publication of the Annual Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life 2011-12.

The Committee was advised that the Annual Report reflected on the work of the Committee on Standards in Public Life and Standards issues during 2011/12, which included reflections on the changes to the local framework. The Committees' wide Terms of Reference were set out in the report, a copy of which was attached at Appendix A.

It was noted that a letter had been sent to the Secretary of State, Eric Pickles in June 2012 from the Chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which expressed reservations about the new standards arrangements, the diminution of the independent role, the lack of effective sanctions and the short time period in which Council's had to implement the new arrangements. A copy of the letter to, and the reply from, the Secretary of State were attached to the report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

STC9 STANDARDS UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer provided the Committee with a verbal update on recent decisions taken elsewhere under the previous standards legislation and on the adoption of the Code of Conduct across the Borough.

Details on recent cases were given from the following authorities:-

- Surrey Heath Borough Council;
- Cambridge City Council;
- Calderdale Council;
- Torfaen County Borough Council;
- Fairford Town Council;
- Ealing Council;
- Stony Stratford Town Council;
- Oxford City Council; and
- Cotswold District Council.

The Monitoring Officer also reported on the current position across Halton and Cheshire in respect of the adoption of the new Code of Conduct. On 4 October 2012, a meeting with Halton Parish Council Clerks provided a further

opportunity to invite nominations for Standards Committee Parish Council members, although to date none had been forthcoming. In addition, at the meeting the Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer provided advice on the adoption and application of their respective Codes of Conduct for Parish Councillors.

It was reported that on 17 October 2012, training on the Borough Council's Code of Conduct was offered to Elected Members and it was noted that this was well attended. The training provided examples of the practical application of the Code, the opportunity for Members to ask questions and for them to fully engage in the process.

It was further reported that some local authorities had already considered revisions to their Codes. However, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that this committee would be able to consider any necessary changes as and when required, and recommend them to Council.

RESOLVED: That the update be received.

Meeting ended at 3.05 p.m.