

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 15 January 2003

PRESENT: Mrs Roberts (Chair); Councillor Pritchard (Deputy Chair); Councillors Gardner, Hadland, Mason and Mr. Romose

1. APOLOGIES

An apology was received from Councillor Allen.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2002 were signed by the Chair.

3. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES

None.

4. MATTERS OF URGENCY WHICH BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THE CHAIR IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED

None.

5. SECTION 66 REGULATIONS- UPDATE

The Borough Solicitor reminded members of their previous discussion concerning enforcement of the Code of Conduct and the provisions under the Local Government Act 2000 for the Standards Board to refer less serious incidents back for local investigation. The regulations that would give effect to this provision were still awaited. It was understood that following the consultation exercise the ODPM was having to reconsider some elements of the draft regulations; they might now be published in the Spring.

Resolved:

That the position be noted and that unless further information about the Regulations is available or no other critical business is required to be done, the next meeting of the Committee scheduled for 25 March 2003 be cancelled.

6. PLANNING PROTOCOL- FURTHER REPORT

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report and commented that the Planning Committee had raised no comments on the Protocol at its meeting held on 18 September 2002. It was noted that the Standards Board were giving consideration to advice on situations of "pre-determination" where a councillor may have expressed an opinion publicly on a planning application before then determining it at a development control committee.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Probity in Planning Protocol be adopted.

7. PARISH COUNCILS:

The Borough Solicitor reported that Mr. Brownlee had resigned from the Committee as he was moving away from the area. It was assumed that Mr Hughes, the nominated substitute, would take over and NALC had been contacted in this respect. It was noted that it was important that the Parish Council's representative attended as business affecting the parishes could not be conducted without their presence.

The Borough Solicitor further reported on a meeting of NALC held in the autumn at which Monitoring Officers and a representative of the Standards Board had been invited. No issues directly relevant to Northampton had been raised, most had been to do with rural nature of the majority of parish councils.

Resolved:

That the report be noted and the Borough Solicitor pursue the Parish Councils representation on the Committee with NALC.

8. UPDATE ON STANDARDS BOARD INFORMATION AND BULLETINS

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report and commented that the Standards Board had initially assessed the 1,800 referrals made to it and had stated that "complaints" that had not been made in the proper form or were otherwise mischievous would not be pursued. About 50% of the referrals made came from councillors about other councillors. The majority of these, in turn, came from parish councils.

It was noted that the first meeting of the Standards Board Adjudication Panel was scheduled for 16 January 2003. Details of determinations would be nationally available subsequently.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

9. STANDARDS BOARD LEAFLET ON "COUNCILLORS BEHAVING BADLY"

The Borough Solicitor submitted a booklet prepared by the Standards Board which was aimed at the general public.

It was noted that all co-opted members to the council's committees had signed undertakings to abide by the Code of Conduct and had completed declaration of interest forms. Further training for members would be arranged as part of councillors training following the local elections in May.

Resolved:

That the report be received.

The meeting concluded at 17.58 hours.

M3103