

# **NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**Tuesday, 10 January 2006**

**PRESENT:** Mrs Roberts (Chair); Messrs Romose, Hughes and Councillors Allen, Duncan, Edwards and Pritchard.

### **1. APOLOGIES**

None.

The Chair welcomed the new Councillors to the Committee and commented that Mr Inch, as the Deputy Monitoring Officer, would in future provide the regular support to it.

### **2. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7 June 2005 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. ANNUAL STANDARDS BOARD CONFERENCE 2005**

The Chair submitted a report and commented that the Government was considering the recommendations of the Standards Board and the Committee on Standards in Public Life in respect of the Code of Conduct. There were likely to be some legislative changes. It was felt that a likely outcome would be the greater involvement of the independent members.

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

### **6. STANDARDS BOARD UPDATE**

The Solicitor to the Council submitted a report commenting that in future, bulletins from the Standards Board would be circulated as received. He further commented that the training DVD had been received in the previous few days; it was understood that it portrayed a mock case and covered local investigations by Monitoring Officers. He also referred to a letter dated 10 January 2006 from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister that summarised the Government's response to the recommendations of the Standards Board and the Committee on Standards in Public Life in respect of standards of conduct in local government. The letter referred to a discussion paper and set out the principal potential changes to the current arrangements and the extension of the conduct regime to local government employees. It was noted that some of the changes would necessitate primary legislation.

- RESOLVED:** (1) That the report be received and that a viewing of the training DVD form part of the next meeting of the Committee.
- (2) That copies of the Government's discussion paper on Standards of Conduct in Local Government be circulated to any member of the Committee wishing to have it and that a summary be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

## **7. ROLE OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Solicitor to the Council submitted a report that referred to the changes to the Council's political structures and governance arrangements agreed by Council on 29 September 2005 and in particular to the Committee's new role in monitoring the Improvement Board.

- RESOLVED:** (1) That a further report be made to the next meeting of the Committee setting out guidance on how the Committee's monitoring role should be carried out.
- (2) That monitoring of the Improvement Board becomes a standing item on future Committee agendas.

## **8. SUB-COMMITTEE/ PANEL FOR LOCAL DETERMINATION**

The Solicitor to the Council queried whether the Committee would wish to set up a Sub-Committee for local hearings or whether all members would want to be involved. The Chair referred to previous discussions which had agreed that a Sub-Committee of three members should be set up, comprised of two independent members (for these purposes the Parish Council representative being regarded as an independent member) and one Councillor. It was noted that the Monitoring Officer would be the advisor to the Panel and would ensure that hearings were conducted fairly. It was noted that reserves should be warned in case any of the Panel members could not attend a hearing.

**RESOLVED:** That a protocol for the make up and conduct of hearings be drafted and submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

## **9. ETHICAL GOVERNANCE TOOLKIT**

The Solicitor to the Council submitted a report and elaborated thereon. The Chair commented that East Northamptonshire Council had taken a lead on a pilot scheme and suggested that enquiries could be made of the Council as to the usefulness of the toolkit. Enquiries could also be made of Councils similar to Northampton that had experience of it.

There was a need for the Committee to be proactive and the toolkit would be a useful training as well as auditing tool and may be of use to the Audit Committee. It was noted that this might be done jointly with the Audit Committee.

**RESOLVED:** That a further report be made to the Committee on how this could be progressed and the necessary budgeting.

## **10. INDEPENDENT MEMBERS FORUMS**

The Chair commented that the Chair of the County Council's Standards Committee had made a suggestion for the independent members of Standards Committees across the County to get together to discuss a range of issues and to be able to support each other. An initial meeting had been arranged for 27 February. It was noted that a representative from the Standards Board would also be attending and making a presentation.

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

#### **11. TRAINING/ NEWSLETTER**

The Solicitor to the Council commented that training was an important function of the Committee, however, in the current transitional period and with an announcement on a new Code of Conduct imminent, perhaps further training should be left to later in the year. It was noted that the last newsletter published by the Committee had been in February 2005 and a brief discussion took place in respect of the Committee's obligations under the Local Government Act 2000 for the training of Councillors. The Chair commented that she would raise the issue of Councillor training at the Independent Members Forum to see what other Councils were doing and to see if any partnership arrangements were possible.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That an updated version of the last published newsletter, together with highlights of changes to the Code of Conduct be drafted for the next meeting of the Committee.
  - (2) That the use of a night already identified under the Council Development Programme be investigated for the general training of Councillors on standards issues.

#### **12. PROPOSED ANNUAL REPORT**

The Solicitor to the Council noted that the Committee had previously made an annual report and in the Council's current circumstances it was suggested that a report be made later in the year once a work plan could be devised. It was noted that the Chair would enquire at the Independent Members Forum about examples of work plans.

**RESOLVED:** That the position be noted and that the Committee aim to submit a report to the last Council meeting of 2006.

#### **13. LOCAL DETERMINATION- COUNCILLOR STEWART**

The Solicitor to the Council commented that the full decision of the Hearing would be published shortly.

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

The meeting concluded at 18.55 hours

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