

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD IN
ROOM 27, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
ON WEDNESDAY, 01 JUNE 2005 AT
7.30 PM

PRESENT:

District Council Members:

Councillor J Warren (Chairman).
Councillors A L Burlton, M Wood.

Parish Councils' Representative:

Mr B Taylor

Town Councils' Representative:

Mrs E Woods

Independent Member:

Mr A Walker

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Corporate Governance
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic Services

80 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Mr J Morphew.

81 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Mrs E Woods to the meeting following her recovery from injuries received following a fall.

The Chairman reported that the Council had recently approved a number of changes to its senior management structure. As a consequence, Simon Drinkwater was now the Authority's Director of Corporate Governance.

The Chairman congratulated Councillor A Burlton on his recent appointment as Vice-Chairman of East Herts Council.

ACTION

RESOLVED ITEMS

82 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED – that Councillor J Warren be elected Chairman of the Standards Committee for the 2005/06 Civic Year.

83 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 12 April 2005 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

(Note: The Director of Corporate Governance undertook to provide all Members with the copies of the approved procedure for local investigations (Minute 718 of 12 April 2005 refers.)

84 A CODE FOR THE FUTURE – CONSULTATION PAPER ON THE REVIEW OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report on the consultation paper prepared by the Standards Board for England on the review of the Members' Code of Conduct.

The Committee noted that, as the Code had been in force for three years, the Board had felt it appropriate to review

its effectiveness and to address issues that had given rise to debate.

The Committee noted the timetable of the review and that the deadline for interested parties to submit comments on the consultation paper was 17 June 2005.

The Monitoring Officer highlighted the key areas identified by the Board for comment.

These key areas formed the basis of 29 questions listed in the consultation paper.

The Committee agreed responses, as now detailed, to each of the 29 questions (see Appendix to these Minutes.)

The Committee supported the Monitoring Officer's suggestion that District and parish/town council members be encouraged to respond to the consultation paper.

RESOLVED – that in relation to the consultation paper on the review of the Code of Conduct for all members (A) the response appended to these Minutes be made, and

DCG

(B) District Council and parish/town council members be encouraged to respond to the issues identified.

DCG

85 REVIEW OF PROBITY IN TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report upon a proposal to undertake a review of probity in the context of town and parish councils within the District of East Herts.

The Committee recalled that one of its terms of reference was the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct in town and parish councils.

The Monitoring Officer suggested that the review should commence with a diagnostic exercise, in the form of a questionnaire, designed to identify which ethical and

probity issues arose for town/parish councils and to assess their relative seriousness and priority.

The Committee considered and approved the proposed questionnaire subject to a number of amendments as now detailed. The questionnaire would be sent to all town/parish clerks for distribution to their members.

The Committee supported the Monitoring Officer's suggestion that focus groups, involving representatives of town/parish councils, meet during the latter half of 2005 to discuss and address the issues identified in completed and returned questionnaires.

The Committee agreed that an interim report on the findings of the focus groups should be submitted to a future meeting. Pending consideration of this report, any further decisions on whether or not to undertake further work, or to make recommendations, regarding training to be provided to town/parish councils on conduct matters be deferred.

RESOLVED – that (A) a diagnostic exercise, as detailed in the report now submitted and based on the questions forming an appendix thereto (as amended), be undertaken as part of the review of ethical and probity issues faced by town/parish councils in the District; DCG

(B) focus groups involving Town and Parish Councils be held during the latter half of 2005 to discuss and address the issues identified by the exercise referred to in (A) above; DCG

(C) an interim report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee at the conclusion of the focus group meetings, and DCG

(D) any decision on whether or not to undertake further work, or to make recommendations, regarding training to be provided to Town and Parish Councils, be deferred pending consideration of the report referred to in (C) above.

DCG

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm

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Chairman
Date

APPENDIX TO MINUTES OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON
01 JUNE 2005

A Code for the future – An introduction to the review of the Code of Conduct for members

East Herts Council's answers to the 29 questions identified by the Standards Board:

- Q1 Yes.
- Q2 Further principle should be added relating to “confidence” in local government/democracy.
- Q3 Yes. Case law is adequate.
- Q4 Yes. It is for the Board to determine a definition for bullying but the Authority does not believe the Acas definition to be appropriate.
- Q5 No.
- Q6 No.
- Q7 There should be no change.
- Q8 There should be no change.
- Q9 No.
- Q10 n/a.
- Q11 Do not see any reason why there is a need to distinguish.
- Q12 It should be retained but amended.
- Q13 The amendment highlighted in the final paragraph under point 4.5.6 of the consultation paper should be used in the definition.
- Q14 Yes.
- Q15 There is already sufficient provision within the Code.
- Q16 No.

- Q17 Yes.
- Q18 Yes
- Q19 Yes.
- Q20 No ... but exemptions should be extended.
- Q21 Yes ... but exclude lobby groups.
- Q22 Yes.
- Q23 Yes.
- Q24 No ... but they should be required to inform the Monitoring Officer.
- Q25 No.
- Q26 No.
- Q27 No.
- Q28 Yes. The Board should consider and prepare a definition.
- Q29 No. The threshold should be set at £100.