

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD IN
THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY, 11 JULY 2006 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: District Council Members

Councillor J Warren (Chairman).
Councillors H G S Banks, M Wood.

Parish Councils' Representative

Mr B Taylor

Town Councils' Representative

Mrs E Woods

Independent Member

Mr A Walker

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor P A Ruffles

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Amanda Brodie	- Solicitor
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic Services
George Robertson	- Head of Legal Services

RESPONDENTS:

Councillors A Alder, D Filler, M Taffs and
J E Vincent of Sawbridgeworth Town Council

RESPONDENTS' REPRESENTATIVE/WITNESS:

Town Councillor	
R H Beeching	- Representative
Mrs I Theobald	- Witness

123 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Committee considered whether or not to exclude the press and public from the meeting during the discussion of the item of business detailed at Minute 127 below on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. The Committee agreed that this item should be considered in public. The Monitoring Officer would make available copies of the report.

124 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor M Wood declared a personal interest in the matter referred to at Minute 127 below as he was an acquaintance of Councillor A Alder.

Mrs E Woods declared a personal interest in the matter referred to at Minute 127 below as she was an acquaintance of Councillors A Alder and J E Vincent.

Councillor J Warren declared a personal interest in the matter referred to at Minute 127 below as he was an acquaintance of Councillor A Alder. He also advised that they both served on the Local Strategic Partnership Board.

RESOLVED ITEMSACTION125 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED - that Councillor J Warren be elected Chairman of the Standards Committee for the 2006/07 civic year.

ACTION126 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 22 March 2006 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

127 COMPLAINT IN RESPECT OF FOUR TOWN COUNCILLORS: STANDARDS BOARD REFERENCE SBE13202.05 TO 13205.05

At the commencement of this item, the Chairman invited all present to introduce themselves. He welcomed Councillor H G S Banks to his first meeting of the Committee.

The Solicitor submitted a report on a complaint received by the Standards Board in respect of four Members of the Sawbridgeworth Town Council (Councillors A Alder, D Filler, M Taffs and J E Vincent).

The Committee noted that the Standards Board had decided to refer the complaint to the Council's Monitoring Officer for investigation.

Following an investigation by an officer appointed by the Monitoring Officer, it had been concluded that the Town Councillors had failed to register their interest as members of the Sawbridgeworth Young People's Recreation Centre (SYPRC) Management Committee under Article 15 of the Members' Code of Conduct and had failed to declare this interest when considering matters relating to that body at a meeting of the Town Council held on the 31 October 2005.

The Monitoring Officer had decided to refer the matter to the Standards Committee for determination.

A copy of the Investigating Officer's report on the complaint was appended to the Solicitor's report.

The Chairman outlined the process to be followed to consider this matter

ACTION

consider this matter.

The Committee noted that the four Councillors concerned were in attendance and were represented by Town Councillor R H Beeching. The Investigating Officer presented his report. Subsequently, the representative of the four Councillors responded to the Investigating Officer's report and called the Town Clerk as a witness in support of their case.

The Solicitor advised the Committee on a number of matters, particularly that the Town Council was the single trustee of the SYPRC; meetings of the SYPRC Management Committee were not meetings of the Town Council, and the meeting of the Trustees on 26 September was a meeting of the Town Council as it was the trustee. The Solicitor further advised that membership of the Management Committee was a registrable interest and should be declared by the relevant Members at meetings of the Town Council when considering matters relating to the SYPRC.

The Committee, after retiring to another room to consider in private whether or not the Councillors failed to comply with the Code of Conduct as set out in the Investigating Officer's report, returned to the Council Chamber to announce its decision.

The Committee, after due consideration, was satisfied, based on the findings within the Investigating Officer's report, that the four Town Councillors in question had failed to register their interest as members of the SYPRC Management Committee under Article 15 of the Members' Code of Conduct. Further, they had failed to declare this interest when considering matters relating to the SYPRC at the meeting of the Town Council held on 31 October 2005.

ACTION

Having come to the conclusion that the four Councillors had failed to comply with the provisions of the Code of Conduct, the Committee considered whether or not to impose sanctions.

The Committee agreed that no further action should be taken against the four Members of Sawbridgeworth Town Council.

It further agreed that the Monitoring Officer should write to Sawbridgeworth Town Council inviting it to review Members' registerable interests to ensure that such interests was complete. To assist the Town Council, the Committee requested the Monitoring Officer to provide further advice and information to the Town Council on registerable interests and declarations that needed to be made as a consequence.

RESOLVED - that (A) notwithstanding their failure to register their interests as members of the SYPRC Management Committee under Article 15 of the Members' Code of Conduct and also their failure to declare an interest when considering matters relating to this body at the meeting of the Town Council held on 31 October 2005, no further action be taken against Councillors A Alder, D Filler, M Taffs and J E Vincent, MO

(B) the Monitoring Officer be requested to write to Sawbridgeworth Town Council inviting it to review its Members' registerable interests to ensure that such information was complete, and MO

(C) further to (B) above, the Monitoring Officer be requested to provide further advice and information to Sawbridgeworth Town Council on the subject of registerable interests and declarations that needed to be made as a consequence. MO

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm.