

STANDARDS COMMITTEE – Meeting held on Thursday, 22nd July, 2004.

Present:-

Co-opted Independent Members

Mr Fred Ashmore, Mr Mike Field, Mr Zaire Khan and The Reverend Paul Lipscomb.

Elected Members

Councillors Neil Arnold, Balwinder Dhillon, Michael Holledge, Mewa Mann and Lydia Simmons.

Parish Council Member

Councillor Nicoline Brandligt.

Also present under Procedure Rule 29:- Councillor Pauline Key

PART I

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Election of Chair

Resolved - That The Reverend Paul Lipscomb be appointed Chair of the Committee for the current municipal year.

(The Reverend Paul Lipscomb in the Chair)

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17th May 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. Election of Vice-Chair

Resolved - That Mr Mike Field be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee for the current municipal year.

5. Standards Committee Draft Annual Report 2003/2004

The Director of Legal, Democratic and Development Services submitted for consideration and approval the draft Annual Report of the Standards Committee for 2003/04. The Report set out the composition of the Committee, its current terms of reference, its achievements over the last municipal year and its future work programme for the forthcoming year in light of anticipated delegated legislation, developments within the Standard Board for England and the development and maintenance of the Council's own Ethical Framework.

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Recommended - That the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for the municipal year 2003/2004 now submitted be approved by Council.

6. Guidance on Member Involvement in Individual Council Tax and Housing Benefit Cases.

The Head of Revenues, Benefits and Business Services reported that, in accordance with the instructions of the Standards Committee, the Officers had reviewed the Guidance for Members in relation to their involvement in Housing and Council Tax Benefit work. It was considered that the essential aspects of the Guidance should remain unchanged and that revisions should be limited to those which took into account changes in regulations, job titles etc.

Members' attention was drawn to the fact that the Government had changed the way in which appeals against decisions on Housing and Council Tax Benefits were decided upon. Previously, local authorities had established Housing and Benefit Review Boards and it had been necessary within the Guidance to give Members advice on avoiding conflicts of interest if they were appointed to such boards. Under recent Government changes appeals were now initially required to be reviewed by Officers in the Benefits Service and, if that review did not result in a decision in the claimant's favour, the appeal had to be heard by the Appeal Service, set up by the Government as an independent arbiter with no local authority involvement in the decision making process. Members would be able to help and represent their constituents in making an appeal provided their constituent gave the necessary consent. These changes had been incorporated into the revised Guidance.

Recommended - That the revised Guidance on Member Involvement in Individual Council Tax and Housing Benefit Cases now submitted be approved and adopted by Council.

7. Whistle Blowing Policy and Procedure

The Chief Internal Auditor submitted for consideration the revised Whistle Blowing Policy and Procedure which had been amended to take into account changes in job titles, organisational changes etc and to differentiate between the procedure to be followed by employees of the Council and Members of the Public. The Trades Unions and other relevant organisations had been consulted on the revised document and all issues and concerns raised by them had been addressed within the revised document.

Recommended - That the revised Whistle Blowing Policy and Procedure now submitted be approved and adopted by Council.

8. Review of Employee Code of Conduct

In accordance with the Committee's agreed work programme the Director of Human Resources had reviewed the Employee Code of Conduct and submitted, for consideration and approval, a revised code of conduct which had been amended to take into account minor changes such as designations of named officers, changes

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in departmental structures etc; to provide greater clarity and reflect current practice. The Trade Unions had been consulted on the revised Code and suggested changes had been incorporated where applicable.

The Director of Human Resources outlined the main changes which had been incorporated into the revised Code and the reasons for them.

During consideration of the proposed amendments to the Code, it was proposed that in addition to personal interests employees should also be required to declare police cautions and criminal prosecutions that might be taken against them.

Recommended - That the revised Employee Code of Conduct amended as now proposed be approved and adopted by Council.

Chair

(Note: The meeting opened at 6.15 p.m. and closed at 6.50 p.m)