

Standards Committee – Meeting held on Monday, 3rd October, 2011.

Present:-

Co-opted Independent Members:-

Mr Mike Field, Fred Ashmore and Alan Sunderland

Elected Members:-

Councillors Basharat, M S Mann, P K Mann and Minhas

Parish Councillor Representative:-

Parish Councillor Sandra Malik

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Coad and Parish Councillor Nye

PART I

29. Declarations of Interest

None.

30. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 6th June 2011

Resolved – That the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 6th June, 2011 were approved as a correct record.

31. Committee Membership - Verbal Update on Appointment of Standards Independent Member

The Democratic Services Officer informed Committee Members that an appointment had been made to the Co-Opted Independent Member vacancy on the Committee. Following interview by Group Leaders, Mr Roberts was appointed as a member of the Standards Committee at the meeting of Council on 29th September, 2011.

32. Localism Bill: Verbal Update

Kevin Gordon, Monitoring Officer, informed the meeting of the latest position with regard to the Localism Bill. Members were reminded that the Localism Bill proposed to abolish the current standards regime and the model code of conduct and introduce local accountability and a criminal offence of deliberate failure to declare personal interest in a matter. It was noted that the requirement to maintain a standards committee would be abolished, and local authorities would have the option to establish a voluntary standards committee to consider complaints about the conduct of elected and co-opted members.

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It was anticipated that the Bill would receive Royal Assent in late 2011. Members were informed that the present conduct regime would continue to consider, investigate and determine allegations of misconduct until a fixed date ("the appointed day") probably two months after the Bill received Royal Assent. After this date, transitional arrangements would be put in place with local authorities to support cases under investigation. The Monitoring Officer stated that the matter was currently being debated in the House of Lords and circulated excerpts from Hansard to Committee Members for their information.

It was noted that the Register of Interests and the Code of Conduct would remain in force for councils until notified.

The issues which the Council would need to give consideration to were highlighted and included:

- Whether a Code of Conduct for Members be adopted voluntarily;
- if so, should it retain the existing code or draft a new code;
- whether to continue to have a Standards Committee to meet any duty imposed by the legislation; and
- if so, should it continue to have Co-Opted Independent Members and how should they be appointed.

The Monitoring Officer stated that preliminary discussions had been held between the Chief Executive and Groups Leaders regarding the future of the standards regime and in particular their views on the Localism Bill as currently proposed.

In the ensuing discussion, the consensus of the meeting was that a Local Framework including a Standards Committee be retained in any future arrangements regarding standards. It was noted that the views of the Standards Committee would be sought with regards to the arrangements that would need to be implemented following the introduction of the Localism Bill.

Resolved – That the update be noted.

33. Standards Committee Work Programme 2011/12

Details of the Standards Committee Work Programme for the forthcoming municipal year were outlined. Concern was expressed regarding the duration between a matter being referred to for investigation and the determination sub committee hearings. The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that arrangements had been put in place to ensure that any future standards investigations would not exceed a time limit of three months for completion of the investigation.

Resolved – That details of the Work Programme be noted.

Chair

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(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.10 pm)