

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

16th June, 2003 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillors Dolling, McKenzie, Mead and Simmons.
Mr. J. Jones, Mr. B. Neale and Mrs. J. Spendley (Independent Members).

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR (REF: 1)

Resolved: That Councillor Simmons be elected Chair of this Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year.

2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR (REF: 2)

Resolved: That Mr. J. Jones (Independent Member) be elected Vice-Chair of this Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year.

3 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE (REF: 3)

An apology for absence from the meeting was received on behalf of Councillor Johnston.

4 MINUTES (REF: 4.1)

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4th November, 2002 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5 CONSULTATION WITH MEMBERS (REF: 8)

Resolved: That the Chair and Vice-Chair be appointed as the Members of the Committee whom Officers are required to consult before taking action previously delegated for specific functions not forming part of the previous Scheme of Delegation to Officers where consultation with Members has been specified and urgent action for which power is not delegated to Officers.

6 ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES (REF: 9.1)

The Monitoring Officer reported that he and Mr. Jones had attended the Second Annual Assembly of Standards Committees held in Birmingham on 9th and 10th June, 2003.

The Monitoring Officer commented that the event had been very useful in terms of learning about the Section 66 Regulations, hearing problems other areas had experienced and talking to other local authorities.

Mr. Jones commented that independent members around the country felt isolated and that there could be moves to create a regional organisation, which the Standards Board had agreed to co-ordinate, in order that independent members could share experiences.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Monitoring Officer be requested to circulate a copy of the Annual Assembly pack to all Members of the Committee.

7 UPDATE ON REGULATIONS UNDER SECTION 66, LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 (REF: 9.2)

The Monitoring Officer updated the Committee with regard to the proposed Regulations that had been made under Section 66 of the Local Government Act 2000. He reminded Members that the Section 66 Regulations would provide the framework under which cases would be referred back from the Standards Board for England to local authorities for local determination.

In addition, a supplementary paper was tabled at the meeting that provided details of the first set of Regulations under the Act which had been made and laid before Parliament and were due to come into force on 30th June, 2003. Members were advised that the Council's procedure would need to be amended to take account of the Regulations.

The second set of Regulations, which would provide the framework for local investigations, were expected in the Autumn after amendments to the Local Government Act 2000 had been approved by Parliament.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

8 MONITORING OF CODE OF CONDUCT (REF: 9.3)

The Monitoring Officer invited the Committee to review the experience of the Council's Code of Conduct for Members and to monitor its operation and effectiveness.

The Monitoring Officer referred to Minute 15(ii) of the Committee which resolved that the Code of Conduct would be reviewed on an annual basis.

Mr. J. Jones commented that he considered it too early to comment at this stage but agreed that the Code of Conduct should be reviewed on a regular basis.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That, as the Committee were of the view that there had been no significant problems with the introduction and implementation of the Code of Conduct over the past year, it be agreed that the Code of Conduct continue to be reviewed on an annual basis.

9 NEW MEMBERS AND CODE OF CONDUCT (REF: 9.4)

The Monitoring Officer reported on the position in relation to the Code of Conduct for Members following the Borough elections held on 1st May, 2003.

Members were advised that at the Borough elections 22 Members were newly elected and that all 48 Members had signed their declaration of acceptance of office which contained an undertaking to observe the Code of Conduct.

The Monitoring Officer reported that he had run two training sessions relating to the Code of Conduct for all Members of the Council on 14th and 15th May, 2003. The sessions were attended in total by 21 Members 17 of which were new Members.

A Member of the Committee suggested that those Members who did not attend either training session should be supplied with the material presented.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Monitoring Officer be requested to circulate the material presented at the Code of Conduct training sessions to those Members who did not attend, including the Independent members of the Committee and the co-opted members of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee.

10 TRAINING FOR MEMBERS (REF: 9.5)

The Monitoring Officer updated the Committee with regard to the current position on training for Members and sought the Committee's views on future training.

An Independent member commented that there ought to be a mechanism for Corporate Directors and Heads of Service to be made aware of the same issues relating to the Code of Conduct as Members of the Committee.

He further commented that it would be helpful for all Members of the Committee to receive written material issued by the Standards Board.

The Monitoring Officer reported that the Standards Board did issue bulletins and, in addition, had a reasonably informative website.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Monitoring Officer be requested to circulate any information previously distributed to the Committee to the new Members of the Committee.

(iii) That the Monitoring Officer be requested to circulate bulletins issued by the Standards Board to all Members of the Committee.

(iv) That Members of the Committee be requested to notify the Monitoring Officer of any training they wished to undertake.

(Note: The meeting ended at 6.47 p.m.)