

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES

**Meeting held at the Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City
on Thursday, 2 March 2006 at 7.30 p.m.**

PRESENT: *Mr N. Moss (Independent Chairman)
Parish Councillor R. Wornham and Councillors S.K. Jarvis, David Kearns and
M.R.M. Muir.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Corporate Legal Manager (representing the Monitoring Officer) and Senior
Committee and Member Services Officer.*

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Parish Councillor M. Goddard.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2005 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chairman.

3. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other items were presented for consideration.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation at this meeting.

6. STANDARDS OF CONDUCT IN ENGLISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT – THE FUTURE

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report informing the Committee of the Government's response to the Standards Board recommendations on the review of the Code of Conduct for Members, to the recommendations of the ODPM Select Committee, and to the recommendations of the Graham Committee on Standards of Conduct in Public Life, on a new Ethical Framework. The following appendices were submitted with the report:-

Appendix A – Draft Model Employees' Code of Conduct
Appendix B – General Principles: Members' Code of Conduct

The Committee was advised that the one of the impacts of proposed changes to the new ethical framework would be to substantially increase the workload of both the Committee and Monitoring Officer, as more complaints would be dealt with at a local level rather than by the Standards Board. Complaints would be "sifted" by the Monitoring Officer in order to identify any that were frivolous or vexatious – those that remained would be referred to the Committee.

The Corporate Legal Manager confirmed that the Code of Conduct currently provided that, where a Member had a prejudicial interest by reason of another relevant local authority of which he/she was a member, a public authority in which he held a position of general control or management, or a body to which he had been appointed or nominated by the authority as the authority's representative, the member may elect to treat that interest as merely personal, thus enabling the member to speak and vote on the matter.

However, the Government had endorsed the recommendation of the Standards Board that such interests should now only be treated as prejudicial where the matter under consideration would have a direct impact on the body concerned (for example a grant of money) or where the Member was involved in a regulatory decision, such as planning or licensing, but that even in such instances the Member should still be allowed to speak to the matter and answer questions before withdrawing before the debate and any vote.

The Committee asked officers to investigate and report back on the publicity requirements for advertising Members' Allowances, Members' Expenses and the register of Members' Gifts and Hospitality.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the discussion paper that sets out the vision for the future conduct regime for Local Authority Members and the new proposed ethical framework be noted;
- (2) That the following be noted;
 - (a) the potential in increased workload that will need to be undertaken by the Standards Committee and the Council's Monitoring and Deputy Monitoring Officers.
 - (b) the reciprocal arrangement that has been entered into with Bedford Borough Council, South Bedfordshire District Council and Mid Bedfordshire District Council in order to ensure that resource can be made available at best value if a demand for external assistance is required.
 - (c) the risk of carrying out such an investigation has been added to the Council's Risk Register;
- (3) That officers investigate and report back on the publicity requirements (if any) for advertising Members' Allowances, Members' Expenses and the register of Members' Gifts and Hospitality.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure compliance with Part III of the Local Government Act 2000 and subsequent legislation.

7. VACANCY FOR SECOND INDEPENDENT MEMBER (VICE-CHAIRMAN) OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Committee discussed the vacancy for the second independent Member (Vice-Chairman) of the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED: That the District Councillor Members of the Committee be requested to ask appropriate individuals in their community, without party political affiliations, if they would be interested in being considered for appointment as the second independent Member (Vice-Chairman) of the Committee and, if so, provide their contact details to the Monitoring Officer as soon as possible.

REASON FOR DECISION: To endeavour to maximise the independent membership of the Standards Committee.

The meeting closed at 8.05pm.

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Chairman