

At a meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on FRIDAY, 11TH FEBRUARY, 2011 at 1.00 p.m.

Present:-

Mr G.N. Cook in the Chair

Councillors M. Forbes, Tate, Wakefield together with Mr. J.P. Paterson, Mr. C. Stewart and Councillors Hepple and Wilkinson (Hetton Town Council).

Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Charlton and Shattock.

Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 30th September, 2010

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 30th September, 2010 (copy circulated) were submitted.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Item 4 – Protocol for Local Authority Partnership Working
Councillor Tate declared a personal interest as Chair of Hetton Home Care.

Protocol for Local Authority Partnership Working

The Executive Director of Commercial and Corporate Services submitted a report (copy circulated) informing the Committee of a Partnership Behaviour Protocol which had been developed by Standards for England.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Elaine Waugh, Monitoring Officer, highlighted the aims of the Partnership Behaviour Protocol and the suggestion that it could be used to assess the compatibility of partners by asking them to sign up to some common values and behaviours.

Ms. Waugh advised that the Council had already recognised the importance of partnerships and the need for good governance arrangements and that it had developed a Code of Practice for Partnerships. However it was considered that the Protocol and the principles contained therein produced by Standards for England would form a valuable supplement to this Code.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the Partnership Behaviour Protocol be commended to the Council as a supplement to the Council's Code of Practice on Partnerships and that as part of the process of inviting tenders and/or developing future partnership arrangements, in each case consideration be given to the option of incorporation of the Protocol, adapted as appropriate to fit the circumstances.

Review of the Standards Regime

The Executive Director of Commercial and Corporate Services submitted a report (copy circulated) informing the Committee of the provision included in the Localism Bill to abolish Standards for England, the requirement for authorities to have Standards Committees and the National Code of Conduct.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Elaine Waugh, Monitoring Officer, advised that the Bill as currently drafted, in place of the Standards Board Regime, provided for Authorities to have a duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and to be able to establish their own voluntary Codes of Conduct.

Ms. Waugh stated that further guidance and detail on the proposed regulations was awaited and that Members would be advised of developments as the Bill progressed through Parliament.

The Chairman commented that it was his view that the Council should clarify the declaration of interest procedures and make them easier to understand and therefore for Members to comply with. He suggested that the Council may like to consult the Standards Committee on any future proposed arrangements it was considering in order to continue to carry out the Authority's duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Elected Members in view of the changes anticipated under the provisions of the Localism Bill. In addition, to take into consideration the work the Standards Committee had undertaken over the years to assist the Council in this, prior to making any decision as to whether to abolish the Committee.

Members of the Committee concurred with the Chairman in respect of the valuable role the Standards Committee had played in helping to promote and maintain high standards of conduct in the Authority; this being due to the knowledge and understanding the Members of the Committee had on how the Council operated and the role of Elected Members.

In response to Councillor M. Forbes, Ms. Waugh advised that the review of the legislation did not include Council partners. However, the Council did have a Partnership Code of Practice and some partners had also adopted a Code of Conduct for themselves as they had recognised this as being important.

Full discussion having taken place, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be noted and that the Committee be advised of further developments as the Localism Bill progresses through Parliament.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) Mr G. N. COOK,
Chairman.