

At a meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2010 at 1.00 p.m.

Present:-

Mr G.N. Cook in the Chair

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

Apologies for Absence

All Members of the Committee being present, there were no apologies for absence.

Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 28th May, 2010

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28th May, 2010 (copy circulated) were submitted.

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

Minutes of the meeting of the Consideration and Hearing Sub-Committee of the Standards Committee held on 5th July, 2010

The minutes of the meeting of the Consideration and Hearing Sub-Committee of the Standards Committee held on 5th July, 2010 (copy circulated) were submitted.

The Chairman advised that both the complainants and Councillor Wake had contacted the Monitoring Officer and advised that they were happy with the procedures followed and the outcome of the hearing, believing it to have been a fair process.

2. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Consideration and Hearing Sub-Committee held on 5th July, 2010 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Item 8 – Local Determination of Allegations of Misconduct – Case 01/10

Councillor Wakefield declared a personal interest in the above report as a close associate of Councillor Ellis.

Abolition of Standards for England

The Chief Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) informing Members that the Government's "Programme of Government" of 20th May, 2010 contained a commitment to "abolish the Standards Board regime".

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Solicitor, Mr. R.C. Rayner, advised that it was likely to result in the closure of the organisation between January and March 2012, however, it was unclear as to what would remain. In the meantime, the local standards framework still existed. Standards for England planned to continue to fulfil its statutory duties and Standards Committees and Monitoring Officers had an obligation to keep the system operating.

Mr. Rayner stated that he believed that the Code of Conduct had improved Councillors' behaviour. There had been more recently a further announcement that there was merit in the standards framework. Standards Committees were becoming astute at weeding out trivial complaints and Mr. Rayner stated that he did not see why there was a need to bring in further legislation. He referred to the statement made by the Local Government Secretary regarding making failure to register or declare an interest or deliberately seeking to mislead the public about an interest would become a criminal offence and commented that he felt this to be excessive. Mr. Rayner asked Members to note the report but in the meantime carry on business as usual.

Councillor M. Forbes commented that she had always felt that the Standards Board was an expansive body, however, the Standards Committee had managed well to deal with issues on a local level.

The Chairman commented that he felt Standards Committees had been a good thing and that it would be sad if they were lost as they provided transparency and independence.

3. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

Protocol in relation to Members' Business Dealings – Councillor B. McClennan and Councillor I. Kay

The Chief Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) informing the Committee that notifications had been received by and on behalf of the above named Members in relation to their business dealings with the Council.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Monitoring Officer, Mr. R.C. Rayner, briefed the Committee on the circumstances surrounding Councillor McClennan's and Councillor Kay's business dealings with the Council and the arrangements put in place.

4. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

Protocol in relation to Members' Business Dealings – Councillor G. Miller

The Chief Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) informing the Committee in relation to Councillor G. Miller's business dealings with the Council as Chief Executive and Managing Director of Tyne and Wear Education Business Link Organisation.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

5. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

Local Determination of Allegations of Misconduct – Case 01/10

The Chief Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) advising that the investigation of the complaint received in respect of a Councillor had now been completed and that he was seeking to make arrangements for a meeting of a Consideration and Hearing Sub-Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

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

6. RESOLVED that the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Standards Committee, depending on availability, together with Councillors M. Forbes and Shattock, be appointed to serve on the Sub-Committee on a date to be fixed in late November 2010, which will undertake the functions under Regulations 17 and 18.

Retirement of the Monitoring Officer

The Chairman referred to the impending retirement of Mr. R.C. Rayner. He thanked Mr. Rayner for the wisdom and guidance he had provided to him to support him in his role as Chairman and wished him and his family a very happy retirement.

Mr. Rayner stated that it had been an honour to be the Council's Monitoring Officer. He thanked Members for the support they had given to him and the good working relationship they had enjoyed together, wishing them all well for the future.

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