

Standards Committee

A meeting of Standards Committee was held on Thursday, 26th April, 2007.

Present: Mr F.W. Hayes (Chairman), Cllr Sherris, Cllr Mrs Beaumont, Cllr J. Fletcher, Mr L W Hedley (Parish Representative), Mrs F Robinson (Independent Member) and Mrs E. Chapman (Independent Member)

Officers: D. Bond, M. Henderson and M Jones (LD)

Also in attendance: Cllr P. Baker, Cllr N. Teasdale, Mr T. Bowman (Parish Representative)

Apologies: Cllr P. Baker, Cllr N. Teasdale, Mr T. Bowman (Parish Representative)

1333 A Revised Model Code of Conduct for Local Authority Members

Members were provided with a report that provided the Committee with the opportunity to consider the proposed new model code of conduct, which was made by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 2 April, 2007 and would come into force on 3 May 2007.

It was explained that Local Authorities (including Town and Parish Councils) and other relevant bodies would have six months to adopt the code from the date it was made. This meant that the code should be adopted by no later than 1 October 2007. If it was not adopted by that date, its mandatory provisions would automatically come into force.

Members were asked to provide comments on the new code's provisions. Any comments could then be submitted to Cabinet and Council in due course.

To assist the Committee in its consideration of the new model code Members were provided with the following documents :-

- A copy of Stockton's response to the Department for Communities and Local Government's consultation paper and draft new model code of conduct.
- The Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2007 made on 2nd April 2007.
- A copy of the current code of conduct.
- A Local Government briefing note relating to the new model code.
- A note on the main features of the new code which had been prepared by the Council's Monitoring Officer.
- The Explanatory Memorandum to the Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2007
- The 10 general principles of conduct.

The Committee briefly discussed the provisions of the new code. Members noted that despite highlighting certain issues at the consultation stage the new code still contained some areas of uncertainty and potential confusion. The Committee hoped that the Standards Board's Guidance, due to be issued on

3rd May, would provide greater clarity.

The Committee considered that the Council should adopt the model code of conduct at the earliest opportunity and that Town and Parish Councils within the Borough should be advised similarly.

The Committee considered that it was important that every Member of the Council be provided with a copy of the Code, when adopted, and appropriate training be provided to Borough, Town and Parish Members. It was considered that because of the importance of the code, to all members, training should be treated as compulsory and monitored by this Committee.

It was accepted, however, that ultimately it would be a matter for individual members to ensure that they took up training opportunities which would be offered.

RECOMMENDED to Council that:

1. At the earliest opportunity, the Council adopts with immediate effect the code of conduct for members prescribed in the Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) Order ("the 2007 Order"), in its entirety, in place of the Council's existing code of conduct for members, together with the general principles of conduct as an unenforceable preamble.
2. A copy of the adopted code of conduct be provided to every member of the Council.
3. All Town/Parish Councils be advised to adopt as soon as reasonably possible, the code of conduct for Members prescribed in the 2007 Order, but excluding those provisions which are not mandatory for parish councils save for paragraph 12 (2) (in part), in place of their existing codes of conduct for members; and that
4. As soon as practicable, training for the Council's Members and for Town/Parish Council Members is provided, and that such training is treated as compulsory, with its take-up by each member being monitored and reported on by the Committee.

RESOLVED that:

5. A further report be submitted to the Committee when the Standards Board's proposed guidance on the new Model Code of Conduct and related matters becomes available.

Councillor Fletcher asked that he be recorded as having abstained from voting on recommendation 4.