



MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

FRIDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2006 2.30 PM

PANEL MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. C. Holtom (Chairman)
Mr. F. Mann (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Gibbins
Councillor Judge
Councillor Rose

OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer
Deputy Monitoring Officer
Committee Support Officer

54. MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Judge was appointed the parish representative with voting rights for this meeting.

55. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lovelock, Wilks, Dolby and Holmes.

56. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

57. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7TH JULY 2006

The minutes of the meeting held on 7th July 2006 were confirmed as a true record of the decisions taken.

58. APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATION BY THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Decision:

To grant a dispensation for six months to allow Bourne Town Council to consider matters relating to the possible relocation of its offices. The dispensation to allow the five district councillors and one council employee who are also members of the town council to take part and decide matters relating to the relocation, only when there are less than 50% of the town council present at the meeting considering the matter.

An application had been received from Bourne Town Council to grant a further six-month dispensation to enable them to discuss the possibility of relocating or remaining at the town hall. Out of the fifteen councillors on the town council, six were district councillors and one was a district council employee.

The dispensation request was circulated. The Monitoring Officer explained that, unlike their previous requests, Bourne Town Council still had 50% members who were able to take a vote on the issue raised. The relevant regulations stated that a dispensation could be granted when more than 50% members were unable to take a vote.

The chairman acknowledged the provisions in the regulations but stated that he considered there to be a role for common sense in determining this request, especially as there was no other body able to grant the town council a dispensation. The town council only had enough members able to take a vote so it would prove very difficult for them to make a decision if any member was absent. The issue about their premises had been very transparent and this should be taken into consideration.

This was discussed by the committee who decided that it wished to enable Bourne Town Council to continue to operate in its decision-making. It therefore decided to grant the dispensation, subject to the proviso that it would only apply in those cases where the number of members present who did not require dispensation were less than half the total number present.

59. SITUATION REPORT - ALLEGATIONS OF BREACHES OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Decision:

- (1) To ask the Monitoring Officer to contact the Standards Board for England to explain the Standards Committee's concern about the time taken for the Board to complete investigations into allegations.***
- (2) To write to the Standards Board should further pressing of this matter be required.***

The Monitoring Officer reported that there was one outstanding allegation under investigation by the Standards Board and one under local investigation by herself, which would conclude shortly. It was likely that a special meeting of the standards committee would be arranged for a hearing.

She added that since the last meeting of the committee, several allegations had been received relating to district and parish members but that the Standards Board had decided not to investigate these.

The committee discussed the time taken for the Standards Board to complete investigations into allegations. It was considered that some of the timescales had been grossly excessive.

60. EAST MIDLANDS IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP - PARISH PROJECT WORKER BID

Decision:

To support the council's bid for a parish project worker.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer reported on behalf of the Scrutiny Officer, who had submitted a bid to the East Midlands Improvement Partnership for funding for a parish project worker. She clarified that the post would report to the district council and the Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils. A briefing note was circulated that outlined the purpose and main features of the post. The outcome of the bid was still awaited.

The committee was very supportive of this bid, as communication between the parishes was very important.

One of the parish representatives explained that whereas the briefing paper referred to parishes achieving the “Quality Mark”, this should be “Quality Council Status”.

61. PARISH TRAINING PLAN

The Committee Support Officer reported on progress with achieving a training plan. A pre-council meeting session had been arranged in Stamford for 23rd January 2007. Accommodation at Market Deeping Town Council was considered too small to invite other parish councils so the officer was looking to arrange a separate session at the Deepings Community Centre. It was proving difficult to find a parish near Grantham that could host a training event but this was still being pursued.

One member commented that the scheduled training was close to the parish elections in May 2007 and training would therefore have to be repeated. This was acknowledged by the chairman who agreed that repeating training would be necessary.

62. ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

Decision:

That the following be raised at the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees:

- ***Time taken to investigate allegations received by the Standards Board.***
- ***Need to enforce time-limits for responses during investigations.***
- ***The committee's support for devolution and the need for its implementation.***
- ***How much the Standards Board costs to operate.***

The chairman reported that the vice-chairman and himself would be attending the first day of the next assembly later in October. There were several workshops they would be attending at which concerns and issues could be easily raised with senior members of the Standards Board and central government. The focus for this conference was on devolution, the forthcoming white paper and training.

The committee was asked if any issues should be raised at the conference, and these are recorded above.

A parish representative, who had recently attended the National Association of Local Councils conference, reported that a debate had been called for the abolition of the Code of Conduct and the Standards Board (although the motion to do so failed). This evidenced the perception that parishes are bound by the Code of Conduct more so than central government politicians.

63. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 3.10p.m.