

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

31 January 2011

Attendance:

Mr P Smith (Independent Member - Chairman) (P)

Councillors:

Banister (P)
Baxter (P)
Berry (P)

Clear (P)
Chamberlain (P)
Johnston (P)
Lipscomb (P)

Independent Members and Parish Representatives in attendance:

Mr J Barnett (Independent Member)
Ms J Collins (Independent Member).
Ms C Hicks (Independent Member)

Ms J Bond (Parish Representative)
Mr J Harris (Parish Representative)
Mr J Watson (Parish Representative)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr M Evans (Parish Representative).

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 27 September 2010 be approved and adopted.

3. **LOCALISM BILL – FUTURE OF STANDARDS FRAMEWORK**

(Report ST85 refers)

In answer to questions, the Corporate Director (Governance) confirmed that the national Code of Conduct would be abolished, but every local authority would be able to introduce their own Code. The only sanctions which could be included in the new local codes were censure or withdrawal of Council facilities, as it was intended that allegations about serious misconduct would be referred for investigation by the Police, who would have the option of instigating criminal proceedings.

He also explained that, whilst the Council may have a monitoring role in respect of parish councils Register of Interest forms, it would not continue to investigate complaints against parish councillors. Some Members were concerned that parish conduct may suffer as a result of the new proposals and asked whether the Council could, if it so wished, retain a more active role where parish complaints were involved. The Corporate Director (Governance) replied that it would be inappropriate to adopt a role beyond that defined by law, as parish councils were separate legal entities. Currently, it was envisaged that each council (including parishes) would be responsible for handling their own complaints. He reminded the meeting that both the National and Hampshire Association of Local Councils provided ongoing support for parishes, with guidance about probity and ethics generally.

Whilst noting the above information, the Committee remained concerned that the public may not receive adequate guidance and support when dealing with probity issues at a parish level. Therefore, they agreed that a letter be forwarded to the two local Members of Parliament, expressing concern about how the new proposals affected parish councils and requesting that a proper system of monitoring and control (not necessarily undertaken by the district council) be put in place, not least to maintain public confidence in this important tier of local government.

RESOLVED:

1. That, subject to forwarding a letter to the two local Members of Parliament as detailed above, the proposals for the future of the Standards framework be noted.
2. That the decision of the Council to endorse the two year extension of the term of office of the Independent Members and Parish Representatives be noted.

4. **MONITORING OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS BY INDEPENDENT MEMBERS AND PARISH REPRESENTATIVES**

(Report ST86 refers)

The Committee supported the proposals set out in the report and added full Council and Licensing Sub-Committee to the list of meetings to be monitored.

With regard to the questionnaire, it was agreed that the order of Questions 5 and 6 be transposed, as that appeared more logical regarding the assessment of public participation.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the above comments, the Independent Members and Parish Representatives undertake further evaluation of Council and committee meetings, to ascertain the level of compliance with the Code of Conduct and other guidance.

5. **REVIEW OF 2010 AND FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**
(Report ST87 refers)

With regard to the parish training on 20 October 2010 which was cancelled due to lack of numbers, it was noted that more direct mailing to parish clerks may generate greater interest than items in 'Parish Connect'.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and the proposed work programme for 2011/12 be approved.

The meeting commenced at 6.15pm and concluded at 7.10pm

Chairman