

Cherwell District Council

Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 21 March 2011 at 6.30 pm

Present: Dr Sadie Reynolds (Chairman)

Councillor Fred Blackwell
Councillor Timothy Hallchurch MBE
Councillor Chris Heath
Councillor James Macnamara
Councillor Lawrie Stratford
Councillor Rose Stratford
Derek Bacon
Kenneth Hawtin
Councillor David Carr
Councillor Alan Greenslade-Hibbert

Apologies for absence: Jim McBeth
Councillor George Parish
Councillor Douglas Williamson

Officers: Liz Howlett, Head of Legal & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Nigel Bell, Team Leader - Planning and Litigation
Natasha Clark, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

22 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

23 Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting

There were no petitions or requests to address the Committee.

24 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.

25 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2010 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Committee Membership

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer submitted a report which sought consideration of the membership of the committee.

The Committee was advised that Cllr Greenslade-Hibbert had relinquished his position as parish representative on the Committee as he would be standing down at the next parish council election. The Committee thanked Cllr Greenslade-Hibbert for all his invaluable contribution to the Committee and wished him all the best for the future.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer explained that in light of Cllr Greenslade-Hibbert's resignation, the Council needed to appoint another parish representative to ensure it met the required legal minimum number of parish representatives. Cllr Coley, deputy parish representative, had indicated that he would be happy to become a full member of the Standards Committee.

The Committee noted that should Cllr Coley be appointed parish representative by Council, there would be no deputy representative. The Committee considered the recruitment of deputy parish representatives and agreed that in light of the proposals in the Localism Bill to abolish the standards regime, no deputy parish representatives should be recruited at this time.

Resolved

- (1) That it be recommended to Council that Councillor John Coley be appointed Parish Representative to take effect following the parish elections in May 2011.
- (2) That Councillor Greenslade-Hibbert be thanked for all his hard work whilst on the Standards Committee.
- (3) That it be agreed that in light of the proposals in the Localism Bill to abolish the standards regime, no deputy Parish Representatives be recruited at this stage.

Nomination to Corporate Governance Panel

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer submitted a report which sought the appointment of a member of the Standards Committee to the Council's Corporate Governance Panel.

Resolved

- (1) That Councillor Timothy Hallchurch be appointed to the Corporate Governance Panel for 2011/12.

28 **The Future of the Standards Regime**

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer submitted a report which sought consideration of the proposals in the Localism Bill relating to the future of the standards regime.

The Committee discussed the revocation of the requirement for local authorities to adopt and abide by a model code of conduct and to maintain a Standards Committee chaired by independent members. The Committee also considered that whilst there would no longer be a mandatory code of conduct, councils would still have a duty to promote good conduct and could adopt a voluntary code of conduct should they so wish.

Members of the Committee commented that the public would still expect local authorities to maintain high standards and for that reason Cherwell District Council should set the standard for behaviour through the adoption of a voluntary code. Members noted that a large number of areas that currently fell within the remit of the Standards Committee were being abolished by the Localism Bill and commented that a logical solution, particularly if the Council did choose to adopt a voluntary Code of Conduct, would be to transfer responsibility for promoting and maintaining the Code to the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee.

The Committee noted that Full Council would ultimately decide whether or not the Council would adopt a voluntary Code of Conduct and this would not be until such time as the Localism Bill passes into legislation. The Standards Committee, having considered the proposals in the Bill, would however make recommendations to Council on the approach Cherwell District Council should take.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) That Council be advised that the view of Cherwell District Council's Standards Committee is that the Council should adopt a voluntary Code of Conduct and continue to give limited support to parish councils in the district. However, Members believe that the Standards Committee should be abolished and the responsibilities that will remain in light of the Localism Bill proposals be transferred to the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee.

29 **Draft Standards Annual Report**

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer submitted a report which presented the draft Standards Annual Report 2010/11.

The Committee noted the section on the Appointments to the Standards Committee and agreed that the report should record the Committees' thanks to Cllr Greenslade-Hibbert who would be standing down from the Committee at the end of the 2010/11 Council year.

The Committee discussed the section on “The Localism Bill and the Future of the Standards Regime” and agreed that it should reflect the views of the Standards Committee that had been agreed at the previous agenda item, namely that Council should adopt a voluntary code of conduct and continue to give limited support to parish councils in the district, that the Standards Committee should be abolished and the responsibilities that will remain in light of the Localism Bill proposals be transferred to the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee.

Resolved

- (1) That the Annual Report 2010/11 be approved.
- (2) That the publicity arrangements for the Annual Report 2010/11 would be as follows: send the report electronically to the local media with a press release; send the report, electronically where possible, to every Parish Council in the District; and, publish the report on the Council’s website.
- (3) That the Annual Report for 2010/11 from the Standards Committee be recommended to Council to note.
- (4) That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be delegated authority to make minor amendments to update the Standards Committee Annual Report 2010/11 in light of any further announcements about the Standards Board regime by the Government prior to the publication of the Annual Report.

30

Head of Legal and Democratic Services / Monitoring Officer

The Chairman reported that this would be the Head of Legal and Democratic Services / Monitoring Officer last Standards Committee meeting as she was leaving Cherwell District Council. Members thanked the Head of Legal and Democratic Services / Monitoring Officer for her support and guidance to the Committee and wished her all the best for the future.

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm

Chairman:

Date: