

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in the Wantsum Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 11 May 2011.

PRESENT: Miss R MacCrone (Chairman), Mr L Christie, Mr D S Daley, Mr K A Ferrin, MBE Mr P Gammon, MBE

ALSO PRESENT: Mr A J King, MBE Mrs F Leathers

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr G Wild (Director of Governance and Law), Mr P Sass (Head of Democratic Services) Mrs M Cooper (Member Liaison Manager)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

8. Substitutes/apologies

(Item 1)

An apology for absence was received from Mrs Nadra Ahmed. It was also noted that Mr Ferrin had replaced Mr London on the Committee; the Chairman welcomed Mr Ferrin to his first meeting of the Committee.

9. Declarations of Interest

(Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members of the Committee.

10. Minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2011

(Item 3)

In relation to item 3 on page 1 of the minutes of the previous meeting, Mr Sass circulated details of the web access statistics for the Members' Annual Reports, which would be produced every six months from now on.

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2011 be approved as a correct record.

11. Members' Annual Reports

(Item 4)

Mrs Fiona Leathers, Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel, was present for this item.

Mrs Leathers introduced her report, stating that five Members didn't submit their annual report on time, which the Panel found disappointing and that there was no apparent reasons for the non-submissions.

There ensued a detailed discussion on the possible reasons for the five non-submissions; the impact of the local elections on the ability of some Members to complete their reports on time, particularly the twin-hatted Members; the workloads of Members generally; the value of annual reports as a performance management tool and a public record of the activities of elected representatives; and the future Member role under both existing and emerging legislation.

The principle of continuing with Members' Annual Reports was supported by the Committee, but the Independent Remuneration Panel was asked to reconsider the format and content of annual reports, with a view to making them simpler to complete. The Committee also agreed not to name and shame those Members who had not completed their reports on time this year.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

12. The Localism Bill - proposed changes to the Standards regime *(Item 5)*

Mr Wild explained that maintaining a voluntary code of conduct was one way of complying with the expected new duty to promote high standards of ethical conduct at Member level, but warned that any voluntary Standards Committee would not have any real sanctions at its disposal to respond to breaches of the voluntary code. In addition, the inclusion of independent Members on a voluntary standards committee would result in any "decisions" of the Committee having to be advisory only.

The Chairman stated that, under the provisions contained in the Localism Bill, elected Members would still have a duty to declare interests and referred to the proposed new criminal offence of failing to declare prejudicial interests.

Following a detailed discussion, the following conclusions were made:

- The principle of there being a voluntary code of conduct for Members, together with a mechanism to investigate alleged breaches of the voluntary code was supported, but with more emphasis on local resolution and informal action, such as targeted training and advice to Members.
- Public confidence that the County Council took ethical conduct at Member level seriously was important
- The commencement date for the new arrangements was likely to be April 2012 and the Committee was supportive of a consultation exercise being undertaken on the various options in time for the County Council to determine a way forward at its December 2011 meeting.

Resolved: that (1) the contents of the report be noted; and (2) the Head of Democratic Services prepare a draft consultation document on the future of the ethical standards regime for the next meeting of the Committee in July 2011.

13. Standards Committee Work Programme and future meeting dates *(Item 6)*

Resolved: that the future work programme be noted, subject to the inclusion of the Committee's Annual report to the County Council being added to the agenda for the July meeting.

14. Date of Next Meeting: 14 July 2011
(Item 8)

The next scheduled Committee meeting date was noted.