

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Standards Committee held at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 14 June 2006.

PRESENT: Mr J A Ogden DL (Chairman), Mr L Christie, Mr D S Daley, Mrs F Leathers, Mr J F London and Miss R MacCrone.

IN ATTENDANCE: The Director of Law and Governance, Mr G Wild; the Head of Democratic Services, Mr S C Ballard; the Member Services Manager, Mrs J A Corbyn; and, for item 3 only, the Personnel Adviser, Ms L Clarke.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

5. Minutes (Item 1)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2006 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

6. Members' Annual Reports (Item 2 - Report by Head of Democratic Services)

(1) The Chairman explained that Members' Annual Reports had been introduced at the request of the Member Remuneration Panel because the Panel had felt that there needed to be some publicly-available record of what Council activities Members had undertaken each year in return for the allowances they had been paid. Annual Reports were now also used by Group Leaders as a tool for appraising the performance of their Members, and this was welcomed provided that it did not delay submission of the forms.

(2) The Member Remuneration Panel had considered the Annual Reports submitted by Members for 2005/06 at its meeting on 1 June and the report set out the Panel's comments on them. Having considered the Panel's comments, the Standards Committee was being invited to make its own comments to Council on the Members' Annual Reports.

(3) Some concern was expressed about the requirement that all Members should complete their forms electronically, given that some Members still found it difficult to use computers for this sort of purpose. The Director of Law and Governance explained that training in the use of computers was offered to all Members and, in the last resort, secretarial assistance could be provided to Members for the electronic completion of their forms.

(4) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the comments of the Member Remuneration Panel, as set out in the report, be endorsed;

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- (b) random sampling of forms to validate their accuracy be introduced with immediate effect;
- (c) the Committee's comments to Council:-
 - (i) include reference to the thanks expressed by a profoundly deaf Member for the special support arranged by officers to enable her to play a full part in meetings;
 - (ii) emphasise the Committee's concerns about Members' Annual Reports being submitted late and/or unsigned by both the Group Leader and the relevant Member.

7. Criminal Records Bureau Checks on Members

(Item 3 - Report by Chief Executive)

(1) The Committee noted that the Council had no power to disqualify, or impose any other sanction on, any Member who refused to undergo a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check, although it was recognised that adverse publicity could result for the Member concerned. In addition, the Council could ensure that any Member who refused to undergo a CRB check was not appointed to a position where he or she would come into direct contact with children or vulnerable adults.

(2) Ms Clarke explained how the CRB checking process for staff currently worked within the Council. The Director of Law and Governance said that it was intended to use a similar process for Members, with the results of all Member CRB checks being passed to him in his capacity as Monitoring Officer. If any CRB check disclosed that a Member had any relevant convictions, etc, he would inform, in confidence, the Chief Executive, the relevant Group Leader and/or the Standards Committee as appropriate, and agree what action should be taken.

(3) Ms Clarke and the Director of Law and Governance emphasised that all results of CRB checks were treated in the strictest confidence and were retained for only six months before being shredded. Because they comprised sensitive personal data, they were not subject to disclosure to third parties under the Freedom of Information Act.

(4) RESOLVED that Council on 22 June be recommended to agree that:-

- (a) all current Members be requested to voluntarily agree to submit to an enhanced-CRB check;
- (b) enhanced-CRB checks be made a Council requirement for Members elected at the next County Council election in 2009.

8. Standards Committee Draft Annual Report for County Council

(Item 4 – Report by Head of Democratic Services)

RESOLVED that, subject to amendments to reflect the Committee's decisions under Minutes 2 and 3 above, the draft Annual Report, as appended to the report to the Committee, be approved for submission to Council on 22 June.

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9. Date of Next Meeting
(Item 5)

The Committee agreed that the date for its next meeting should be set, in consultation with all Members of the Committee, when there was business requiring consideration by the Committee.