

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in the Wantsum Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 25 November 2008.

PRESENT: Miss R MacCrone (Chairman), Mr L Christie, Mr D S Daley, Mr J F London and Mr P Gammon, MBE.

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

26. Substitutes and apologies
(Item 1)

It was noted that Mrs Ahmed was not present and an apology not received. Mr Sass was asked to contact Mrs Ahmed to ensure that she had received the papers and was aware of the meeting date.

27. Declarations of Interest
(Item 2)

No personal or prejudicial interests were declared by any Member of the Committee.

28. Minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2008
(Item 3)

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2008 were approved and signed as a correct record.

29. Role of the Standards Committee
(Item 4)

(1) The Committee considered a report of the Head of Democratic Services and Local Leadership in relation to the current and possible future role of the Committee, with particular regard to the promotion of high ethical standards. The Committee considered the results of a survey undertaken by Lancashire County Council into the role of Standards Committee, together with a Standards Board for England publication on the role and makeup of Standards Committees.

(2) During the debate, the following key conclusions were drawn:

- (a) The Committee's existing role and activities in the promotion of high standards of conduct by both elected and co-opted Members is a positive one. The Committee's annual report to the County Council, now in its sixth year, is good practice; the new responsibilities for local investigations have been introduced smoothly; there is excellent cooperation with the

Independent Remuneration Panel; and there is a constructive working relationship with the 3 Group Leaders in relation to the work of the Committee.

- (b) It is always good to see how other authorities deal with similar issues and the debate prompted by the work carried out by Lancashire County Council was constructive and interesting.
- (c) Compared to some other authorities, there is a partial crossover at KCC between the work of the Standards Committee and the Governance and Audit and Selection and Member Services Committees. Members agreed that they were not seeking to replicate any of the work of these Committees.
- (d) Members noted that the quarterly Standards Board Bulletin is sent in hard copy to all Members of the Council, together with a covering letter summarising the key points. The next such Bulletin was due to be received during December.
- (e) In relation to the size and composition of the Committee, Mr Sass was asked to confirm in writing to Members the relative appointment periods for the independent Members of the Committee.
- (f) The Chairman mentioned her role as a member of the Kent and Medway Independent Standards Committee Member Liaison Group, which she said was a useful forum to discuss areas of common interest.
- (g) Mr Sass was asked to check the last time that the remuneration for independent Members was agreed and whether it was appropriate to include the matter in the forthcoming review.
- (h) With regard to training, it was agreed that the independent Members of the Standards Committee should include details of their training in the Committee's annual report.
- (i) Members agreed that a report should be submitted to each meeting of the Standards Committee, giving the relevant details of the current stage of any complaints that had been investigated by the Assessment Sub Committee, anonymised accordingly.
- (j) It was suggested that there should be a standing item each year to review the Register of Members' Interests, Gifts and Hospitality, starting in the new Council term.
- (k) It was also suggested that the Committee should review at least once a year whether personal and prejudicial interests are being properly recorded by Members at meetings.
- (l) It was agreed that it was good practice to continue to encourage a constructive working relationship with the 3 Group Leaders and that they should all be invited to attend a meeting of the Standards Committee at least once a year, possibly in connection with the Committee's review of registered and/or declared interests or another appropriate matter.

- (3) RESOLVED that the Head of Democratic Services and Local Leadership be asked to prepare a revised work programme for the Standards Committee, taking on board the comments and conclusions listed above.

30. Variation in the order of business
(Item 5)

The Committee agreed to vary the order of business as set out on the agenda, by taking item 6 (Member Development) before item 5 (DCLG Consultation Paper on the Code of Conduct for Members)

31. Member Development
(Item 6)

(1) The Committee considered a joint report from the Head of Democratic Services and Local Leadership and the Director of Personnel and Development in relation to the progress being made on the Member Development Charter, the Member Development Policy and induction and development events for Members.

(2) It was noted that, whilst there had been opportunities for ongoing training for Members, the primary focus currently was in relation to the Member Induction and Development programme for the next Council term beginning in June 2009, of which the most significant aspect from this Committee's perspective was the Code of Conduct and ethics, including the role of the Standards Committee.

(3) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

32. Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Consultation Paper on the Code of Conduct for Members
(Item 5)

(1) The Committee considered a report from the Head of Democratic Services and Local Leadership, which set out a proposed response to chapter 2 of the consultation paper issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), in relation to proposed changes to the Member Code of Conduct.

(2) It was noted that KCC's response to chapter 3 of the consultation paper, relating to a proposed model code of conduct for employees, was being dealt with by the Director of Personnel and Development.

(3) In relation to the proposed response to Question 2 (definition of criminal offence), it was suggested that police cautions should not be included within the definition of criminal offence, as it was possible for cautions to be applied differently in very similar situations, which could lead to inequality. After a vote, it was agreed that the reference to police cautions in the response to question 2 and 11, be deleted.

(4) RESOLVED that the proposed response to the DCLG Consultation Paper on revisions to the Member Code of Conduct be approved, for submission to and determination by the Selection and Member Services Committee, subject to the deletion of the references to including police cautions in the definition of criminal offence in the responses to questions 2 and 11.