

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY, 16TH AUGUST 2007 AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors C. R. Scurrall (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair) and S. P. Shannon, Mr. S. E. Allard (Independent Member), Mr. N. A. Burke (Independent Member) and Mr. J. Cypher (Parish Council Representative).

Officers: Mrs. D. Warren and Ms. D. Parker-Jones.

7/07 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs. N. E. Trigg (Independent Chairman) and Mr. I. A. Hodgetts (Deputy Parish Council Representative).

8/07 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were received.

9/07 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 14th June 2007 were submitted.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

10/07 **COUNCIL DECISIONS ON STANDARDS COMMITTEE MATTERS**

A report advising of the decisions made by the Council in relation to the new Code of Conduct for Members, as modified by the Standards Committee at its meeting on 14th June 2007 to include local amendments, and the Appointment of Parish Council Representatives to the Standards Committee was submitted.

Reference was also made to the Members' Interests Guide (copy attached to these minutes), which had been drawn up by officers following the introduction of the new Code and which it was noted would be available at all meetings of the Council's committees for quick reference.

**RESOLVED** that the contents of the report and the Members' Interests Guide be noted.

11/07 **OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT STATISTICS - UPDATE**

Further to the request made by the Committee at its previous meeting, the Deputy Monitoring Officer provided an update on the subject matter of the six "other" complaints referred to in the annual statistics compiled by the office of the Local Government Ombudsman on complaints recorded against the Council during the twelve month period ending 31st March 2007. It was noted that the complaints covered: leisure and culture; homelessness; waste management; enforcement (Planning - although it was not known why this had not been included in the category of Planning and Building Control); transport and highways (this complaint having been referred to the County Council); and a miscellaneous matter.

Statistics were also provided in relation to Ombudsman complaints listed for other local authorities within Worcestershire. Although Bromsgrove had the highest number of complaints determined, none of these had resulted in a finding of maladministration. The Committee noted that the Council encouraged the right of parties to complain where this was felt to be necessary and there was a legitimate case for doing so.

**RESOLVED** that the position be noted.

12/07 **UPDATE ON LOCAL INVESTIGATIONS**

The Committee was advised that two local investigations into Member conduct were currently underway. The Investigating Officer had completed a draft report for one of these, which it was noted would necessitate an additional meeting of the Committee being convened for some time in September in order to decide whether a final determination hearing was required for this. The second investigation was still in the process of being completed and would likely be dealt with at the Committee's October meeting.

Exceptional circumstances had resulted in a slight delay with the initial investigations for these, which the Standards Board for England had been kept fully advised of and were satisfied with the position.

**RESOLVED** that the position be noted.

13/07 **STANDARDS COMMITTEES IN WORCESTERSHIRE**

The Committee considered a proposal from Mr. J. C. Blakeley, Chairman of Wychavon District Council Standards Committee, on the coming together of Standards Committee members on a county-wise basis to discuss issues of relevance to Standards Committees.

Members supported the proposal, which it was felt would be of particular use during the first twelve months of the introduction of local filtering of complaints. It was felt that both the Chairman of the Committee and the Council's Monitoring Officer should attend the meetings, and that if the Chairman was unavailable the Vice-Chairman should attend in his/her place.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) that the Committee support the proposal; and
- (b) that it be requested that in the event of the Chairman of the Committee not being available to attend a meeting, the Vice-Chairman be permitted to attend in his/her place.

14/07 **STANDARDS COMMITTEE - MEMBER TRAINING**

A draft programme for 'The Changing Role of the Standards Committee' training which would take place at the Council House on 6th September 2007 was circulated and minor amendments were made to the running order of this. It was felt that practical scenarios would be particularly useful with such training. Changes to the current arrangements for the 'first sieve' of complaints was to be covered at the training, which the Deputy Monitoring Officer advised would also likely be included on the agenda for the Committee's October meeting for further discussion.

It was also noted that a further 'Mock Council' training session would take place on 11th October 2007, which Mr. Cypher (the Parish Council Representative) expressed an interest in attending and which it was felt would be of use to the other new members of the Committee who had not attended the previous session of this.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) that the programme for 'The Changing Role of the Standards Committee' training session due to take place on 6th September 2007 be approved, subject to the minor amendments agreed to the running order of this; and
- (b) that arrangements be sought for Mr. J. Cypher (Parish Council Representative) and any other members of the Standards Committee to attend the 'Mock Council' training session due to take place on 11th October 2007 should they so wish.

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm

Chairman

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### INTERESTS - A GUIDE FOR MEMBERS ATTENDING MEETINGS

*Members are reminded that the new Bromsgrove Code of Conduct was adopted by Council and took effect from 19 July 2007. The new Code requires interests to be declared at all meetings, including any informal meetings, you attend as a councillor.*

#### DEFINITION OF INTERESTS

You have a **PERSONAL INTEREST** if the issue being discussed at a meeting affects the well-being or finances of you, your family or your close associates more than most other people who live in the ward affected by the issue.

Personal interests are also things relating to an interest you must register, such as any outside bodies to which you have been appointed by the Council or membership of certain public bodies.

A personal interest is also a **PREJUDICIAL INTEREST** if it affects:

- the finances, or
- a regulatory function (such as licensing or planning)

of you, your family or your close associates **AND** which a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of the facts would believe likely to harm or impair your ability to judge the public interest.

#### DECLARING INTERESTS

If you have an interest you must normally declare it at the start of the meeting or as soon as you realise you have the interest.

##### **EXCEPTION:**

If you have a **PERSONAL INTEREST** which arises because of your membership of another public body you only need to declare it if and when you speak on the matter.

If you have both a **PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTEREST** you must not debate or vote on the matter and you must leave the room.

##### **EXCEPTION:**

If you have a prejudicial interest in a matter being discussed at a meeting at which members of the public are allowed to make representations, give evidence or answer questions about the matter, you have the same rights as the public and can also attend the meeting to make representations, give evidence or answer questions **BUT YOU MUST LEAVE THE ROOM ONCE YOU HAVE FINISHED AND YOU CANNOT DEBATE OR VOTE.**

However, you must not use these rights to seek to improperly influence a decision in which you have a prejudicial interest.

**NOT TO BE REMOVED**

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