

**Minutes of a meeting of the Mid Sussex District Council
Standards Committee held on Tuesday 22nd January 2008
From 6.00pm to 7.15pm**

Present:- Sir Roger Sands (Chairman)
Cllr Christopher Snowling (Vice-Chair)

David Brown
Ian Church
Richard Goddard
Cllr Gina Field

Cllr Sue Hatton*
Cllr Jacqui Landriani
Cllr Heather Ross
Patrick Shanahan

Trevor Swainson
Pat Webster

* Absent

Also Present as Appointed Substitute: Councillor Edward Matthews
Also Present: Councillor Anne Jones

1. SUBSTITUTES

The Committee noted that in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4 – Substitutes at Meetings of Committees etc. – Councillor Edward Matthews had replaced Councillor Sue Hatton for the duration of the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Sue Hatton.

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

4. MINUTES 2ND OCTOBER

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 2nd October 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. MINUTES 28TH SEPTEMBER

The Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Sub-Committee held on the 28th September 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to an amendment to the penultimate paragraph to clarify that the Sub-Committee had advised Mr Williams to continue to abstain from voting on any decisions taken by the Parish Council regarding the Village Hall and to withdraw from the meeting room when such votes were taken.

6. NEW DUTIES IN 2008

The Solicitor to the Council introduced the report, which updated Members on the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, and briefed them on the contents of the Checklist and Code of Conduct guidance produced by the Standards Board for England.

He confirmed that Mid Sussex District Council has made good progress in implementing the new recommendations, and that the Standards Committee is now of size and composition recommended by the Standards Board. It was also noted that after this week's hearing, Mid Sussex District Council will have no outstanding complaints, in accordance with the Standards Board's recommendations.

He informed the Committee that further training on the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 would be held in March, when the requirements of the new legislation will be finalised. It was agreed that this would take place on 5th March at 3.30pm.

Members debated the best way to allocate responsibilities in order to ensure that the same Members were not involved with the filtration task and the hearing for the same complaint. It was agreed that the membership of two Sub-Committees would be designated for the handling of the filtration and hearing stages of all complaints, with Sub-Committees to handle appeals being designated on an ad hoc basis. The Membership and Chairmanship of the two designated Sub-Committees would be rotated on a six-monthly basis to allow all Members to gain experience of all stages of the process.

The Chairman expressed concern at the Standards Board's recommendation that individual Standards Committees develop their own local assessment criteria. He felt that it would be preferable if official guidance were to be issued in order to ensure consistency of approach.

Members stressed the importance of ensuring that members of the public were aware of the new procedures. It was suggested that this should be publicised in the complaints section of the Council's website, in a press release, and through a specific complaint form for complaints against Members. The Solicitor to the Council agreed to bring a report to the next meeting of the Committee on the progress that has been made with publicising the new procedure.

The Chairman also suggested that the Register of Members Interests should be available on the Council's website. The Solicitor to the Council confirmed that this would have to have the agreement of all Members before it could be implemented and he agreed to consult them on this. All Members present at the Committee assented to this proposal.

In response to a Member's question, the Solicitor to the Council confirmed that Members were required to declare all gifts they received as a Member of Mid Sussex District Council, including free tickets to events. He advised that if a Member were to be sent tickets to an event and did not wish to attend this, they should return the tickets or donate them to charity to avoid having to declare them as an interest.

In response to a question, the Chairman informed the Committee that if the filtration Sub-Committee took the decision not to investigate a complaint, the complainant will be informed of the reason for this. The Solicitor to the Council confirmed that value judgments will not be made at the filtration stage, and that the complaints which were likely to be rejected would be those which clearly did not break the Code of Conduct.

RESOLVED

That:-

- (1) The report, including the Standards Board checklist and guidance, be noted.
- (2) Further training on the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 be held on 5th March at 3.30pm.
- (3) The Solicitor to the Council be instructed to consult all Members on the proposal to publish the Register of Members' Interests on the Council's website.

Chairman