

**Minutes of a meeting of the Mid Sussex District Council
Standards Committee held on Wednesday 1st October 2008
From 7.00pm to 8.14pm**

Present:- Sir Roger Sands (Chairman)

David Brown	Cllr Sue Hatton	Cllr Christopher Snowling
Ian Church	Cllr Jacqui Landriani	Trevor Swainson
Town Cllr Richard Goddard	Cllr Heather Ross	Parish Cllr Pat Webster*
Cllr Gina Field	Parish Cllr Patrick Shanahan*	Parish Cllr Jenny Forbes (Substitute Parish Member)

* Absent

14. SUBSTITUTES

No substitutions were notified.

15. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Patrick Shanahan and Pat Webster.

16. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 9th July 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17. DVD PRESENTATION: GOING LOCAL, LOCAL INVESTIGATIONS AND HEARINGS

The Committee viewed a Training DVD relating to the procedure for investigating a complaint against a councillor at local level, and carrying out the subsequent hearing.

The Monitoring Officer clarified to the Committee that the video was produced before the new rules governing complaints and the new code of conduct for members were introduced, and therefore some of the information provided was out of date.

The Chairman and Members asked for clarification on the declarations of interest made by the hearing panel and whether it was good practice to record any investigative interviews or have witnesses present. They also commented that it would be beneficial to hold pre-hearing meetings in advance of the hearing date.

The Monitoring Officer replied that it was possible for a member of the panel to hold a personal interest and remain sitting on the panel: only a prejudicial interest would preclude this. He informed the Committee that interviewee consent was necessary to record or have a witness at an interview, and that it was not necessary to do so anyway if it was not considered material to the case.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the contents of the DVD.

18. TRAINING REQUIREMENTS IN THE FUTURE FOR:

i) Standard Committee Members

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report to Members.

The Chairman commented on the issue of conducting a hearing and asked what options were available for training. He asked how precedents and similar cases could be shared with the Members, and whether any training events would be taking place in the area in the near future.

The Monitoring Officer replied that there would be a such an event, relating to the Code of Conduct, taking place in Crawley in November. He also commented that it would be beneficial for Members to attend hearings at other authorities, though he also noted that assessment and appeal hearings had to be conducted in private. He stated that The Standards Board website holds a list of recent cases, and the penalties given. The Adjudication Panel also has some decisions on their website.

The Chairman commented that the Committee was well prepared, but that information regarding relevant events was always welcome and the Members could then choose to attend as individuals.

Members commented that as they appeared to be some way from having to carry out a hearing a role-play exercise would be beneficial in the meantime. They felt that a mix of different training methods would be useful, and training on the implications of the pending Equalities Act might also be needed. They also felt that a simplified guide to breaches of the code of conduct would benefit all parties.

The Monitoring Officer replied that a role-play exercise was possible, guidance on the Equalities Act could be expected once it was passed and that a new guide relating to the Code of Conduct was expected.

ii) District Members

The Chairman commented that the previous presentations that had been given had attempted to cover the entire Code of Conduct at once. He felt it would be beneficial to concentrate on a few troublesome areas, possibly using a workshop approach. He noted the need to avoid any reference to current cases.

iii) Town and Parish Members

The Chairman felt it was best to contact Town and Parish clerks and ask for their assessment of the necessary training requirements for their members.

This was agreed by the Committee.

Members asked whether it would be helpful to liaise with SALC on this matter. The Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that this had happened in the past, when training was offered to all parish members.

The Chairman commented on the necessity of ensuring a consistent approach to training if other bodies were to be involved. He confirmed that in the near future he would be attending the Forum of Independent Members covering East and West Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

RESOLVED

That the views and comments of the Committee be taken into account when proceeding with future training for members.

19. ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had received an invitation to join this body which he would make available to Members of the Committee if they desired, though the official status of the association was unclear.

The Monitoring Officer commented that he had not previously been aware of this body.

Chairman

