

**Minutes of a meeting of the Mid Sussex District Council  
Standards Committee held on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> July 2009  
From 7.00pm to 7.37pm**

**Present:-** Sir Roger Sands (Chairman)

Cllr Brenda Binge  
David Brown\*  
Ian Church  
Town Cllr Richard Goddard

Cllr Gina Field\*  
Parish Cllr Jenny Forbes\*  
Cllr Heather Ross  
Cllr Christopher Snowling

Trevor Swainson  
Cllr Mike Watts\*  
Parish Cllr Pat Webster

\* Absent

**7. SUBSTITUTES**

No substitutions were notified.

**8. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Binge, Field and Watts, and from David Brown and Jenny Forbes.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed the current parish council membership of the Committee, as notified by MSALC, as Councillors Richard Goddard, Jenny Forbes and Pat Webster.

**9. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Committee discussed points arising from the minutes. The Monitoring Officer clarified that the Constitution Review Group had last approved the protocol on Member Officer Relations in May 2008, but that the Standards Committee could recommend that the Council review this protocol again.

**10. STANDARDS BOARD INTERVENTION, JOINT STANDARDS COMMITTEE AND DISPENSATIONS**

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report to the Committee. He highlighted that any intervention by the Standards Board had a cost implication for the council.

With regard to the Joint Standards Committee he highlighted that this arrangement would remove any suggestion that investigations might lack objectivity, but that there would be a resulting loss of local control over methodology. He also indicated that current no other local authorities in West Sussex were keen on this method of working.

The Chairman noted that sharing of independent members could be considered as a half-way house to a joint arrangement, and might reduce the amount of bureaucracy. Committee members asked how the costs of a joint standards committee would be allocated, and whether this reduced overall membership of the committee. It was also noted that Full Council had raised objectivity concerns that it felt would be addressed by a joint arrangement.

The Monitoring Officer replied that sharing of independent members could be done without a council resolution, but that all the local standards committees across West Sussex had sufficient independent members. He replied that allocation of costs were open to discussions between authorities, and that joint arrangements would lead to a cost saving in terms of membership although there could also be a resulting increase in travel expenses incurred by members having further to go to hearings. He added that most recent standards committee investigations in the county area had been for the county council, and that this was the reason for the lack of local enthusiasm for making joint arrangements.

Members of the Committee then discussed the formation of a joint committee. The Monitoring Officer indicated that it could just be a single large committee, whilst sub-committees for hearings would be made up of an independent and two district members for district complaints, and an independent, district member and parish member for parish complaints.

Clarification was sought as to whether there was an absolute rule dictating the membership of sub-committees. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that hearings for a parish complaint required a parish member, but that hearings for district councils were made up of district members to avoid political bias and to ensure that the sub-committee had sufficient understanding of the District Council to conduct the hearing effectively.

A member of the Committee asked whether any Joint Standards Committee had been set up in other areas. The Monitoring Officer replied that he would check this, but also stated that the process for setting up such committees had only recently been outlined.

On the matter of Dispensations to members the Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that none had been granted recently.

Members of the Committee recalled previous incidences when Dispensations had been granted, such as a planning meeting concerning a facility whose management committee included parish members. In such a case Dispensations had been granted to those parish members who did not hold an office on the management committee.

The monitoring Officer confirmed that Dispensations were appropriate for situations where a committee would not otherwise be able to remain quorate, such as a large scale planning application in a parish.

In response to a question from the Chairman the Monitoring Officer confirmed that political balance would be taken into account when granting dispensations.

The Chairman asked whether it was possible to gauge the chances of Dispensations being required before the next election.

The Monitoring Officer suggested that all town and parish clerks should be informed of the new provisions.

This was agreed by the Committee.

## **RESOLVED**

### **11. ITEMS TAKEN BY THE CHAIRMAN AS URGENT BUSINESS**

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had attended meetings of East Grinstead and Haywards Heath Town Councils to address them on matters concerning the Standards Committee. He informed them that he had an invitation to attend Burgess Hill Town Council and possibly visit Hassocks Parish Council. He informed the committee that he been invited to address the Mid Sussex Association of Local Councils on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2009 and that he had been informed that this would remove the need to attend other parish councils in the district individually.

A member of the Committee stated that each parish would only send one or two delegates to the MSALC conference.

The Chairman declared that he would therefore use the conference to suggest that members of the Standards Committee address parish councils individually.

Trevor Swainson confirmed that he would attend the MSALC conference with the Chairman.

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had received positive feedback after addressing Haywards Heath Town Council, and that he felt the profile of the Standards Committee had received a boost.

A member of the Committee commented that future meetings of the Committee could be deferred if there was insufficient business. The Monitoring Officer informed that Committee that the Standards Board required a minimum number of meetings to take place during the year.

Chairman

