

**Minutes of a meeting of the Mid Sussex District Council
Standards Committee held on Tuesday 8th June 2010
From 7.00pm to 7.39pm**

Present:- Sir Roger Sands (Chairman)

Ian Church
Parish Cllr Jenny Forbes
Town Cllr Richard Goddard
Cllr Jacqui Landriani

Andrew Lewis
Cllr Gordon Marples
Cllr Heather Ross
Cllr Susan Seward

Trevor Swainson*
Cllr Mike Watts
Parish Cllr Pat Webster*

* Absent

1. SUBSTITUTES

No substitutions were notified.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Trevor Swainson and Cllr. Webster.

The Chairman drew the Committee's attention to the change in the independent membership of the Committee. He confirmed that three year terms of David Brown, Ian Church and Trevor Swainson had expired, and that Ian Church and Trevor Swainson had been re-appointed to the Committee. David Brown had been replaced by Andrew Lewis. He confirmed that his own appointment had been for four years and that he had another year to run.

The Chairman expressed his gratitude to David Brown for his effort and commitment over the previous three years, and for manner in which he had performed his duties as Vice-Chairman.

The Chairman also noted that this first meeting of the Council year would normally see the appointment of Chairman. However, as the confirmation of appointments of independent members by Council were pending he would be the only eligible candidate. He proposed that with the Committee's agreement the vote be postponed until the next meeting.

A Member asked whether the independent members had been appointed for a further period of three years, and that whether it might be better for future appointments to be staggered to avoid all the independent members leaving office at the same time.

The Monitoring Officer replied that the recent appointments were all for four years.

The Chairman also introduced the two new Deputy Monitoring Officers to the Committee. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the appointment of two Deputy Monitoring Officers should in most instances avoid the need for the Council to employ an external investigating officer.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 17th March 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2009/ 2010

The Chairman confirmed with the Committee that the Annual Return to Standards for England, discussed at the previous meeting, had already been submitted. He asked whether it was available on the Council's website. The Monitoring Officer replied that an acknowledgement had been received from Standards for England, and that the Annual Return could be made available to Members if they wished.

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report to the Committee. He confirmed that the Council website had been updated with a copy of the complaint form and guidance notes pertaining to the Code of Conduct. He also drew a new area of responsibility to the attention of the Committee: that the Standards Committee would adjudicate whether a local authority officer could be relieved of political neutrality provisions. In reply to questions from Members he confirmed that some officers had faced greater restrictions on their political restrictions since 1989; the new powers did not apply to very senior officers; that the provisions only applied to membership and involvement with political parties and that the Standards Committee would form a sub-committee to adjudicate on such matters.

Both the Chairman and the Monitoring Officer made reference to the possibility that Standards for England could be abolished in the near future, though it would be difficult to abolish the entire monitoring function. The Monitoring Officer also commented that he hoped to continue saving the Standards Committee budget referred to in the report.

The Chairman referred to previous discussions regarding a forward plan for the Committee, and commented that this was included in an informal manner in the report. He referred the Committee to the objective to increase public awareness of the Committee, and noted that a press release would be issued at the same time that the Annual Report was made to Council in July 2010. He also noted that an article would be appearing in the next issue of Mid Sussex Matters.

The Chairman referred to the section of the report concerning training. He noted that there was need to organise training on the conduct of hearings, and that if training materials relating to this topic were not forthcoming from Standards for England then an alternative would be required. He also asked whether there had been any recent progress with the arrangements for involving MSALC in training sessions.

The Monitoring Officer replied that Arun District Council had proposed undertaking joint training sessions, though further details were required, and that training with MSALC was waiting for the new Code of Conduct to be published.

A Member referred to the minutes of the previous meeting, and suggested that an addition be made to the report to Council indicating that the Constitutional Working Party be asked to look at the local Member to Member protocols. Other members indicated that as the CWP only sits between January and March in any year the issue ought to be looked at sooner by the Committee itself. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the Committee could undertake this work, possibly in September. The Chairman stated that other discussions had indicated that this was an area of

concern, and suggested that a passage to the effect that the Committee would review the adequacy of the existing Member to Member protocol be added to the covering report for Council.

This was agreed by the Committee.

A Member noted that the Chairman's statement indicated that he had attended the regional Forum of Independent Members, but not the national Standards for England conference because of the expense. It was asked whether the Standards Committee budget could be used to cover the expenses of attending conferences some distance from the district.

The Chairman replied that it could, but he would only attend such a conference if he felt it would be of particular benefit.

Resolved

That the Annual Report of the Standards Committee be referred to Council, subject to the addition of the following statement :

"The Committee will review the adequacy of the existing Member to Member protocol."

Chairman