

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON TUESDAY, 22 JULY 2008**

MEMBERS

* Mr M Winterton - Independent Chairman

* Cllr B E Carson

* Mr R Allison (Independent Member)

* Cllr G Date

* Mr P Dredge (Parish Representative)

* Denotes attendance

Also in attendance and participating:
Cllrs M J Howarth and S L Rankin

Officers in attendance:

All Agenda Items: Monitoring Officer and Member Support Services Manager;
Item 6 (Minute S.8/08 below refers): Internal Audit Manager.

S.5/08 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 May 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

S.6/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting but none were made.

S.7/08 PROCEDURE AND CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT OF COMPLAINTS

Members considered a report which requested that the Standards Committee adopt the procedures for the handling of complaints against Members of the District, Parish and Town Councils in the South Hams, and criteria against which the Assessment and Review sub-committees could assess such complaints.

During discussion, particular reference was made to:-

- a) the amount of information contained within the papers at the initial assessment stage. To ensure that Members were able to gauge the seriousness of the complaint, the Committee concluded that it would be beneficial to receive an abundance of related information. However, Members advised that for future assessments, they would welcome a brief bullet point summary document which outlined the major issues for each assessment;
- b) public access to meetings. In response to a question, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that it was intended that the initial assessment would not be conducted in a public meeting;

- c) providing quarterly complaints information to the Standards Board for England. The Committee was informed that the Monitoring Officer had just submitted the first report to the Standards Board, advising that the Council currently had three cases at the initial assessment stage;
- d) the difficulties facing Council Members when a colleague was the subject of a complaint. It was acknowledged that this was a difficult issue for the Council Members on the Committee, who inevitably knew fellow Members well, but would need to be objective in the event that any were the subject of a complaint. It was noted that the same test applied, as at paragraph 8 of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- e) reviewing the procedure and criteria for assessment of complaints. The Committee wished to review the procedure and criteria (as presented) after six months of being in operation.

RESOLVED

1. That the procedures and criteria contained in the presented report and appendix be adopted and implemented forthwith;
2. That the procedures and criteria be reviewed by the Committee during January / February 2009.

S.8/08

CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE 2008 – COMPLIANCE REVIEW

A report was considered by the Committee which sought to inform it of the results of the compliance review of the 2008 Code of Corporate Governance.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- a) In light of the Code also being considered by the Audit Committee, Members supported an in principle approach whereby an annual joint meeting be convened in March/April for its presentation to both Committees;
- b) In response to a Member stating that he was aware of a number of households who had not been in receipt of the 'South Hams' Magazine, officers agreed to raise the point with relevant colleagues;
- c) Officers confirmed that the Code was particularly demanding upon resources in the first year. However, since the framework was now established, it was not anticipated to be as demanding in future years;
- d) Members requested that the gifts and hospitality register be annually reported to the Committee. It was agreed that the matter would be presented to the Committee for consideration at its next meeting;
- e) The Committee acknowledged the difficulties in being able to encourage new talent to become Council Members.

RESOLVED

1. That the findings of the Compliance Review of the Council's Code of Corporate Governance 2008 be noted, and the significant governance issues included in the 2007/08 Annual Governance Statement and action plan be approved;
2. That the gifts and hospitality register be annually presented to the Committee for its consideration.

S.9/08

MEMBERS ATTENDANCE – ANNUAL REVIEW 2007/2008

The Committee considered a report which demonstrated the level of Members' attendance at public meetings of the Council for the municipal year 2007/2008.

During discussion, particular reference was made to:-

- a) the continual overall improvement in attendance levels. The Committee wished to record its congratulations to Members for their overall levels of attendance;
- b) the requirement to attend 50% of meetings. The Member who had failed to attend the required 50% of meetings informed the Committee that she had:
 - been in full-time education and had obtained a distinction on her foundation year and was to start a degree course in September 2008;
 - previously been a Member of the Executive. Whilst advising of her wish to be removed from the Executive due to her education timetable, the process of making appointments to Council Bodies was such that she continued to be shown as being an Executive Member for some time after. Therefore, the Member felt that the 35% attendance figure was a slightly distorted figure;
 - continued to attend Tor Homes meetings (including chairing the Resources Committee) and had attended every meeting, due to them being held in the evening;
 - continued to be regularly contacted and available to her electorate throughout the year. On many occasions, this included evenings and weekends and was in addition to attending four different parish councils and representing her electorate at Development Control Committee meetings;
 - not claimed any travel allowances from the Council since returning to full-time education.

In support of the Member, a neighbouring ward Member advised that she was held in high regard locally. In light of these points, the Committee did not feel it necessary to request that officers write to the Member to ask if she wished to return a proportion of her basic allowance for 2007/08.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

(Meeting commenced at 12 noon and concluded at 1.10 pm).

Chairman