

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 4.00 pm on 26 JANUARY 2009**

Present:- M Hall (Acting Chairman – Independent person).
R Whitlam - (Independent Person).
Councillors C A Cant, C D Down and R M Lemon (Uttlesford
Members).
Councillors J Clarke, P Leader and B Merrion (Town and Parish
Councils).

Officers in attendance:- M J Perry (Assistant Chief Executive) and M Cox
(Democratic Services Officer).

S20 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Sean Brady and Councillor K L
Eden.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Colin Clarke from Elsenham Parish
Council to his first meeting of the Committee.

S21 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2008 were approved as a
correct record and signed by the Chairman.

S22 BUSINESS ARISING

i) Minute S20 - Consultation on Code of Conduct

It was reported that the Council's reply to the consultation, putting forward the
Committee's views had been sent to the Department of Communities.

The Committee noted that although it had not supported the adoption of the
Employees Code of Conduct, if this provision did become law, the Code
would by default become part of the officer contract. In answer to a question,
the Assistant Chief Executive would confirm whether the Code would apply to
Parish Council Clerks.

S23 LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT

The Assistant Chief Executive updated the Committee on items which did not
appear on the agenda.

He was pleased to welcome Councillor Clarke to the meeting and thanked the
Association of Local Councils for finding a replacement for Councillor James
so quickly. He stressed the importance of a full compliment of members to
deal with the likely increase in work load arising from the change in legislation.

Members were given details of two cases of a breach of the Code of Conduct which had been referred to this council by the Standards Board under the old regime. Whilst one had been a relatively straightforward case the other had been relatively difficult to investigate but the draft report was now with the parties for comment. It was likely that a hearing would need to be held involving 3 members, a district councillor, a parish councillor and an independent chair.

At the September meeting the Committee had been decided not to enter for the new LGC award relating to the standards function as the criteria had been too unclear. The shortlist had now been published and the Assistant Chief Executive was seeking copies of the submissions. From the evidence so far it was considered that it would be worthwhile to enter for the award in 2010. There would be a report to the next meeting on matters that could be included in the submission and a work programme for achieving this.

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S24

MEMBER' REGISTER OF INTERESTS

The Committee was asked to consider whether the Register of Members' interest should be published on the Council's website. The legislation currently only required the register to be available at the council offices for inspection at reasonable hours. A few councils had adopted the practise of publishing it on their website, which would make the information more accessible as the purpose of the register was to enable members of the public to ascertain the interests of an individual member.

A survey of other Council's had revealed that no other authority in Essex had adopted this practise although Castle Point District Council was considering doing so.

A number of Councillors said that they could see no problem with this suggestion as the names, addresses and wards of District Councillor's were currently on the website and information as to their interests was already in the public domain. However, it was essential that there was a proviso that an interest could be excluded if it could put the councillor in danger of violence or intimidation. The Assistant Chief Executive said that he was not aware of any such cases but para 10 of the Code of Conduct already made provision to exclude interests that were of a sensitive nature.

Some members commented that information on a website was looked at on a more casual basis and could be used to pry into councillor's personal affairs. There was also a feeling that if members of the public had a particular interest or concern they would come to the Council Offices to inspect the register. However, on balance it was felt that the suggestion should be supported as the Council should be aiming to promote openness and transparency and improved access for the public.

It was explained that this Committee could only recommend that this suggestion was adopted and it was up to the District Council and the relevant town and parish councils to decide whether to accept this recommendation. It was appreciated that some parish council's did not have a website in any event. The Assistant Chief Executive said that he did not think it was

appropriate for the Register of Town and Parish interests to be published on the District Council website unless all of the Councils agreed to this.

RECOMMENDED that the Members Register of Interests be published on the Council's website.

S25 TRAINING

The Assistant Chief Executive had undertaken the training on the new vetting procedure for Local Councils. Although not very well attended, the presentation had been well received and there was a better understanding of how the new regime would work.

S26 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that the public be excluded for the following item of business on the grounds that it included exempt information within the meaning of S100I and paragraph 1 part 1 Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972

S27 PARISH COUNCIL UPDATE

The Committee discussed the current situation at Clavering Parish Council. .

The meeting ended at 4.45pm.