

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 4.00 pm on 21 SEPTEMBER 2009**

Present:- S Brady – Chairman (Independent Chairman)
M Hall and R Whitlam (Independent persons)
Councillors C A Cant, C D Down, K L Eden and R M Lemon
(Uttlesford Members)
Councillor R Merrion and M Sullivan (Town and Parish
Councils)

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

S8 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies received.

The Chairman formally welcomed Councillor Sullivan from Hatfield Heath
Parish Council who had recently been appointed to the Committee.

S9 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2009 were approved as a correct
record and signed by the Chairman, subject to correcting two minor
typographical errors.

S10 BUSINESS ARISING

i) Minute S3 (iii) – Training

It was reported that the Association of Local Councils did not provide training
for Parish clerks. However, as part of the process of achieving quality status
the clerk of the parish council was required to be formally qualified and parish
Councils should be encouraged to seek this status.

S11 WORK PROGRAMME

At the last meeting, members had highlighted a number of areas to be
included in the work programme. Since that meeting further proposals for
future work of the committee had been considered and were set out in the
report. Members were asked if they agreed with these suggestions and if
there were any items that they would like to add. It was noted that the
Committee did not have a budget so any work would need to be within
existing resources.

Councillor Cant asked if it would be useful to have a list of frequently asked
questions on the website. The Assistant Chief Executive said that most
questions concerned Members' interests and he had already provided training

and an aide memoire to all members, but he could include some guidance on the website.

During the discussion the Committee was informed of the Standards Board's summary of the number of complaints received the previous year. One notable fact was that compared to the Standard's Board, individual standards committees had referred twice as many cases for investigation.

RESOLVED that the proposed work programme be agreed.

S12 **PROBITY IN PLANNING**

The Assistant Chief Executive reported that the Local Government Association in consultation with ACSeS and the Standards Board had published revised guidance on probity in planning. Members considered suggested amendments to the current scheme in the light of the revised guidance. It was generally agreed that the changes were helpful and made the guidance clearer.

Members felt it was important that Councillors were aware that the guidance applied to all members not just those that were involved with planning. There should also be some mechanism to ensure that members were regularly reminded of the content of this and other codes in the Council's Constitution.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee approve the changes to the current code of Probity in Planning as set out in the report for adoption by the Council.

S13 **PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

The Committee received a report about the options surrounding partnership working following the enactment of the Standards Committee (Further Provisions) (England) Regulations 2009. These allowed for two or more authorities to establish a joint Standards Committee. Some or all of the functions could be delegated to the joint committee and there was guidance as to its membership and operation.

Members said that setting up a joint committee appeared to offer little financial benefit to the council. There was also a feeling that most of the issues dealt with by the Standards Committee were small and local so the members' knowledge of the district was very important. The committee should reflect the character of the local area and be accessible to residents.

The Assistant Chief Executive explained that the Standards Committee had both a policy and regulatory function. Whilst there could be some merit in establishing a joint committee to deal with allegations it would probably be more difficult for a joint committee to come to agreement on a policy issue. If one these functions was delegated the other would still have to be dealt with by the council's own Standards Committee so there would be very little overall benefit with this arrangement.

The regulations did not include two changes that were requested during the consultation, the cooption of members from other authorities or the power to delegate a hearing to the standards committee of another authority. This meant that there was little opportunity for collaborative working between standards committees. However, Members heard that there was opportunity for cooperation at officer level. The Essex Legal Partnership was forming a special interest group to consider standards issues and the Assistant Chief Executive would be an active member of this group. There was now a formal arrangement in place to trade partnership services to enable officers from other authorities to carry out investigations on behalf of colleagues.

RESOLVED that no steps be taken towards joint working over and above those already being taken.

S14 **RECENT DECISIONS OF THE ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR ENGLAND**

The Committee received details of the Adjudication Panel for England cases that had been published since the last meeting of the committee. Members welcomed this information which would assist in determining future allegations that might be received.

S15 **TRAINING**

The Assistant Chief Executive had provided training for Wimbish Parish Council.

The meeting ended at 16.40.