

# NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 10 July 2007

**PRESENT:** Ian Harley (Chair)  
Councillors Capstick, Flavell, Hawkins and Matthews  
Margaret Edwards Parish Councils Representative  
David Hughes Parish Councils Representative  
Jim Inch Senior Solicitor, Deputy Monitoring Officer  
Marjorie Fox Interim Legal Services Manager  
Jackie Buckler Legal Services Officer

### 1. APOLOGIES

There were none.

### WELCOMES AND INTRODUCTIONS

Ian Harley introduced himself as the new Chair of the Committee. He welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited them all to say a short piece about themselves by way of introduction. He commented on the importance of the work of the committee and expressed his aspirations to encourage the Council's achievements and support it in its work to make Northampton a fantastic place.

### 2. MINUTES

As this committee had been convened since the last meeting, the Chair read though the minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2007 and summarised the main points for information. The minutes were then accepted as a true record and signed by the Chair.

### 3. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

### 4. MATTERS OF URGENCY WHICH BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THE CHAIR IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED

There were none.

### 5. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS, CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR

J Inch asked that the matter be deferred as the selection of candidates for the remaining independent posts had yet to be finalised. The Chair asked that the matter be resolved at the earliest opportunity.

### RESOLVED:

That the matter be deferred to the next meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> September by which time the Committee wanted the matter resolved so that they could make the outstanding appointments.

### 6. NEW CODE OF CONDUCT

Before dealing with the report, the Chair asked members what training they had received on the Code. Councillors Capstick, Flavell, Hawkins and Matthews had all attended Standards training, as had the Chair. D Hughes had thoroughly read the new code of conduct, but had not attended training. It was agreed that further training on the new code would be

appropriate and that this would be arranged for after the independent members had been appointed so that they could also attend. J Buckler mentioned that Dan Moody was arranging separate training sessions for Parish Councillors. Cllr Hawkins suggested that the group attend one of the forthcoming conferences relating to Standards but it was felt that it would be sufficient for one member of the committee to attend and feed back to the rest.

J Inch then presented the report and explained that the new Model Code had been prepared by the Secretary of State after extensive consultations. In particular it sought to remove some aspects of the old model code which had been criticised as inhibiting Councillors from fully representing their constituents. It was anticipated that the new Code would be adopted by Full Council at their meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2007. After that date, Councillors would be required to complete new Declarations of Interest.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the Committee welcome the Revised Model Code of Conduct for Members.
- 2) That the Council be invited to pass a resolution adopting the Model Code as the Borough Council's Code of Conduct pursuant to Section 51 of the Local Government Act 2000.
- 3) That the Parish Councils in the Borough be invited to pass a similar resolution (if they have not already done so) adopting the Code in the form prepared by the Standards Board for use by Parish Councils.

### **7. WORK PLAN ISSUES**

J Inch presented the report setting out areas of work that it was suggested the Committee might wish to consider undertaking. He drew Committee members' attention to the list in the Appendix to the report. The Chair suggested that an additional focus could be for the Committee to know the expected behaviour principles for Council Officers and to ensure that there were no contradictions between the codes of conduct for members and employees. J Buckler explained that, although there was no such code of conduct for employees currently in place, there was a member/officer protocol that could be used as a starting point as approved by this Committee. Cllr Hawkins asked that specific points in the code be addressed and M Fox agreed to report back to the next meeting.

J Inch pointed out that the list was not exhaustive and was not presented in any particular chronological or significant order and suggested that, before the next meeting, the Chair and Solicitor to the Council would put dates against each of the items. In order to develop training to address the specific items, M Fox suggested that a link be created with Sue Clarkson, the Council Members' Training Officer. Cllr Capstick suggested that outside speakers be invited to relevant meetings for information and for the sharing of good practice. D Hughes asked for past editions of the Standards Newsletter be produced for the Committee at the next meeting.

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1) That the report be received and the draft Work Plan accepted with the inclusion in item 8 (review of relevant policies) of policies and protocols relating to the conduct of employees.
- 2) That the Solicitor to the Council work with the Chair to agree the timescales to be put into the Plan and report these to the next meeting.
- 3) That copy of past Standards Newsletter be made available to Committee Members at the next meeting.

### **8. PLANNING PROTOCOL**

J Inch presented a report, on the revised Protocol on Probity in Planning that had been prepared by Simon Rowberry, (Interim Change Manager, Planning), as part of the

improvements to the Planning Service, which the Council was seeking to implement in response to the Audit Commission's Service Inspection Report published the previous September. He invited Committee members to comment.

Cllr Matthews suggested that all Councillors have sight of the document and it was explained that it was to go before Full Council for adoption. Cllr Hawkins commented on the importance of all Councillors having knowledge of planning matters so that they could then address issues within their wards. It was also agreed that the document be circulated to all Parish Councils. M Edwards questioned the term 'fettering' and was informed that this referred to the practice, also sometimes called pre-determination, where a Councillor publicly announced their position on an issue before the formal decision had been taken.

The Chair commented that the new Protocol appeared to address every eventuality and gave clear guidelines in a non-threatening manner. He requested that the appreciation of the Committee be passed on to the author on an excellent piece of work. He hoped that all future such documents could be produced with the same clarity.

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1) That the report be received and the proposed new Probity in Planning Protocol be noted.
- 2) That the document be circulated to Parish Councils.

#### **9. STANDARDS BOARD UPDATE**

J Buckler presented the report, to which were attached Bulletins from the Standards Board providing an update on the recent work and advice from the Board. She commented that she would regularly update the Committee on the national position through the bulletins and send them out to Committee members as they were received. She mentioned that the main theme of the most current bulletin was the introduction of the revised Code of Conduct and highlighted some of the main differences from the existing Code. She further reported that the Standards Board was to produce a training DVD to assist in members' understanding of the new Code.

The Chair requested that J Bucker produce summaries of future bulletins for Committee members so that the pertinent issues could be highlighted for them.

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1) That the report be received and its contents noted.
- 2) That future bulletins be distributed to Committee members with an appropriate summary of the main issues.

The meeting concluded at 18:40

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