

# NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Thursday, 18 December 2008

**PRESENT:** Mr I Harley (Chair);  
Councillors Capstick and Hawkins  
Mr T Morris  
Mr D Hughes  
Mrs G Moss

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillors Flavell and Matthews and Margaret Edwards.

### 2. MINUTES

The minutes were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

### 3. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

### 4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

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

There were none.

### 6. ANNUAL STANDARDS BOARD CONFERENCE 2008

The Chair and Monitoring Officer had attended the Annual Standards Board Conference in October and the Chair expressed his regret that more members of the Committee had not been able to attend. It was his hope that the Council would support the Committee to attend in future years but this would be dependent on a successful bid from the Council's training budget.

The Chair referred to the report of the Conference that had been previously circulated. He then tabled a summary of the Local Standards Framework that incorporated the functions and expectations of the committee, including the wider role of the committee, the membership, the role of the Chair and members' remuneration. It was the Chair's ambition that the Committee would become an award winning team, raising the reputation of the Council and showing the people of Northampton its effectiveness. The Chair stressed the importance of Political Leaders of Groups and the Chief Executive, showing ownership of and support for the ethical agenda.

The Chair proposed that the Committee hold a one-day workshop to create a series of strategies to embed the work of the Committee within the Council's structure. It was felt that once the Code of Conduct was fully understood and adhered to across the whole organisation, it would become self-policing and it was the duty of the Committee to ensure that all Councillors behaved in an exemplary manner within this Code. The Chair called for the full support of the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and the Leaders of all political groups in supporting their own parties' representatives on the Committee. With this in mind, he proposed that the Leader and the Chief Executive present short key-note

addresses at the start of the workshop day.

Following the workshop, Committee members would be encouraged to attend other meetings, including Full Council and Parish Council meetings, to highlight the Standard's Code of Conduct and to raise the profile of the Independent Members within the organisation.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the issues raised at the Conference be incorporated into a Standards Committee work plan and that this be discussed fully at a workshop to be organised in the New Year.

**7. CODES OF CONDUCT FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY MEMBERS AND EMPLOYEES- A CONSULTATION**

The Monitoring Officer introduced the consultation paper for amended Codes of Conduct for members and employees. The Monitoring Officer explained that the main driver for the consultation paper on the Model Code on Conduct came about as a result of the Livingstone case. The Consultation paper was suggesting that there be an incorporation of a requirement for the same standards of behaviour to apply to actions taken by members in their private lives where there was a criminal conviction. The second aspect of the consultation paper related to the employees' Code of Conduct and would require all employees to sign up to the broad principles of the Code and there was a further requirement for more senior officers to declare certain interests.

The Chair referred to a hypothetical position where, owing to the nature of a particular investigation, police should be consulted at a very early stage to ascertain whether suspension of access to premises or documents for a determined period was advisable to ensure justice was guaranteed for both investigation and councillor benefit. The Monitoring Officer pointed out that the British legal system was based on the presumption of innocence and suspending a member too early would offend this principle. It was also important to consider the effect on constituents in the event of the suspension of an elected member because they would also be suspended from their representational role.

The Chair then highlighted a number of points from the consultation document and discussion ensued in relation to police cautions, whistle blowing and the future review of the codes by the Standards Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That Committee members consider the consultation document and make any comment before the closing date of 24<sup>th</sup> December 2008.

**8. STANDARDS BOARD- PUBLICATIONS UPDATE**

The Chair welcomed the distribution of the Bulletin with the agenda and it was requested that in future these be despatched to members as soon as received. He then called for the support of the political leadership and key senior managers to become involved in the work of the Committee. It was further suggested that Committee members publicise the existence of the bulletin to other parish and borough councillors.

Councillor Hawkins appealed for a process to be put into place to report the activities of the Standards Committee to Full Council. It was requested that the Monitoring Officer investigate the authority of having a cabinet member on the Standards Committee and to examine possible routes to enable reporting to Full Council. He was further requested to look into the legislation relating to the Chair of the Standards Committee reporting directly to

Council.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the Monitoring Officer investigate a method whereby the Standards Committee can report directly to Full Council.;

**9. ADJUDICATION PANEL GUIDANCE ON REGULATION 17: STANDARDS COMMITTEE (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2008**

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report that outlined guidance on the circumstances in which the Adjudication Panel would consider accepting a reference from a Standards Committee. He encouraged members to familiarise themselves with the document.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That members note the report and familiarise themselves with the guidance.

The meeting concluded at 19:10

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