

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2011 FROM 7.30 PM TO 8.05 PM**

Present:-

Wokingham Borough Members:- *Chris Bowring and Sue Smith*

Independent Members: - *David Comben (Chairman), Anita H Grosz (Vice Chairman), John Giles and Geoff Wilde*

Parish/Town Council representatives:- *Roy Mantel*

*Also present:- Kevin Jacob, Principal Democratic Services
Mary Severin, Deputy Monitoring Officer*

PART I

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE 2011/2012 MUNICIPAL YEAR

It was proposed by Anita Grosz and seconded by John Giles that David Comben be elected as Chairman of the Committee for the 2011/2012 municipal year.

RESOLVED: That David Comben be elected as Chairman of the Committee for the 2011/2012 municipal year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE 2011/2012 MUNICIPAL YEAR

It was proposed by David Comben and seconded by John Giles that Anita Grosz be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the 2011/2012 municipal year.

RESOLVED: That Anita Grosz be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the 2011/2012 municipal year.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 1 March 2011 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Eric Davies, John Heggadon and Pauline Helliard-Symons.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

7. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

8. PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL QUESTION TIME

There were no Parish/Town Councillor questions.

9. UPDATE ON CHANGES TO THE STANDARDS REGIME IN ENGLAND

Kevin Jacob and Mary Severin verbally updated the Committee on the passage of the Localism Bill which as originally drafted contained provision for the abolition of the current mandatory Councillor Code of Conduct Regime, including Standards for England and local Standards Committee. It was noted that it was still expected that the Bill would receive Royal Assent in the autumn of 2011 and come into effect in the spring of 2012.

They explained that a number of amendments had been moved at the Report stage of the Bill's passage through the House of the Lords. The amendments if carried would have reinstated the requirement on local authorities to adopt a Councillor Code of Conduct, and maintain a Standards Committee. Whilst it was impossible to predict the final outcome, there did appear to be some grounds for concluding that the Government's position was changing.

Kevin Jacob commented that since the last meeting he had approached the Borough Council representatives on the Committee to seek their assistance in establishing what the position of the two political groups would be to the future ethical framework. It was hoped that by the time of the next Committee meeting in December, the position would be clearer.

Various Members of the Committee commented that they felt it was important for a Code of Conduct to be retained by local councils as the issue of ethics amongst politicians remained of high public importance and the provision of a Code was a demonstration of transparency and accountability.

10. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMME 2010/2011

The Committee considered a report, (Agenda pages 5 to 8) which set out an overview of training offered to members of Wokingham Borough Council and the take up of that training.

In response to a question, Kevin Jacob confirmed that it was compulsory for members of the Planning Committee and Licensing and Appeals Sub-Committees to receive training prior to taking part in decisions.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1) Notes the progress of the Member Development and Training Programme;
- 2) Notes the training offered to Borough Members during 2010/2011.

11. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2010/2011

The Committee considered its annual report for the 2010/2011 municipal year, (Agenda pages 9 to 14).

Kevin Jacob circulated comments on the draft report from Eric Davies who had apologised for the meeting. The Committee noted that he had suggested that the report needed to be more explicit within the 'What does the Standards Committee Do' section to setting out the Committee's role in providing a pathway for the public and Officers to make complaints about Councillors at all levels and that there was no direct reference to the value added by the addition of independent non- councillors to the Committee through the increased confidence and assurance of impartiality they provided to complainants and the public at large.

In discussion, Members of the Committee supported these comments and the Chairman agreed to make an amendment to his introduction to cover the points raised.

Geoff Wilde commented that he felt that paragraph 7.0 'The Future' should be strengthened and give a stronger steer in highlighting the Committee's firm view that a Councillor Code of Conduct should be retained within the Wokingham Borough Council area and the important role that the Standards Committee might play. This was supported by the Committee.

It was agreed that a revised version of the report would be circulated to the Committee by email prior to onward consideration by Council in November 2011.

RESOLVED: That subject to the minor amendments set out above and the circulation of the finalised version to the Committee, the report be approved for submission to Council.

These are the Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee

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