

**MINUTES of the meeting of Standards Committee held at :
The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road,
Hereford on Friday, 13th April, 2007 at 2.00 p.m.**

Present: Robert Rogers (Independent Member)(Chairman)

Councillor John Edwards and Councillor John Stone
David Stevens (Independent Member)
Richard Gething (Parish and Town Council Representative)
John Hardwick (Parish and Town Council Representative)

125. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

126. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declaration of interest was made:

Member	Item	Interest
David Stevens	Agenda Item 10 – (REFERRALS TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE FROM THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND)	Declared a personal interest and remained in the meeting during consideration of this item.

127. MINUTES

RESOLVED: (unanimously) that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th February, 2007 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

128. APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATIONS RECEIVED FROM TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

There were no applications for dispensations received from Town and Parish Councils.

129. CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

The Committee considered the Council's revised Code of Corporate Governance and foreword. The Code had been designed to ensure that the Council complied with legal requirements, used its resources economically, and accounted fully for its actions.

At its meeting on 20 October 2006, the Committee had suggested amendments to the Code (which were yet to be included), and had requested that its Chairman revise the foreword. Subsequent to this, the Head of Communications and the Audit Manager had made further amendments. It was now necessary to view all the

amendments made to date, and finalise the Code so that the Council was in a position adopt it as a policy.

Members reviewed the Code and made the following principal points:

- In general, the Code was too lengthy and repetitive, and the wording was insufficiently clear. It also contained too many abbreviations without any explanation of their meaning.
- Paragraph 17 of the Code provided insufficient detail on the extent of monitoring undertaken by the Council in respect of corporate governance, and it therefore needed to be more specific.
- Page 5 of the Code should mention training in more detail, and particularly that it continued all year round, with a high number of members participating.
- The document did not reflect the precise role of the Standards Committee.
- Members felt that the document was part Code, part Annual Report, and as such, lacked precise concepts.
- Specific dates were mentioned in the Code in some places; for example, the elections in May 2007. These should be removed so that the Code would not become obsolete too quickly.
- The Head of Legal and Democratic Services felt that the overall format of the document could be improved upon, possibly putting key actions into table form for easier reference.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that the final draft of the Code of Corporate Governance would be a joint undertaking by both the Standards Committee and the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee. The Chairman said that he would contact Councillor Chappell, the Chairman of the other Committee, outlining members' points. He would re-draft the Code, and liaise with the Audit Manager and appropriate Members.

RESOLVED: (unanimously) that the Chairman, in liaison with the Chairman of the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee, the Cabinet Member for Resources, and the Audit Manager, produce amendments to the Code of Corporate Governance for adoption by Council.

130. STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND BULLETIN 32

Members noted the contents of the most recent bulletin from the Standards Board for England (SBE), and made the following comments:

- The Model Code of Conduct would be released on 03 May 2007, and Local Authorities were required to adopt it within six months. Members noted that the new Code did not propose any amendments to the level of sanction that Standards Committees were able to impose at hearings - one of the requests they had made through the consultation process. They noted, however, that it was one of a number of provisions suggested in the consultation which had not been included in the new Code, and it was possible that some of these might be brought in as Statutory Instruments after the Code had been adopted. The Committee would consider the implications of the new Code at its next meeting, and would make recommendations to Council, with the aim of it being adopted at the Council meeting in July 2007.
- The SBE was running a series of pilot projects in relation to the white paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities", which outlined the ways in which local government might take greater responsibility for its ethical environment. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services had informed the SBE of the

Standards Committee's willingness to participate in the pilot projects, and the SBE would forward the first of these - on the local filter process - in due course. The Standards Committee was one of approximately thirty of the more experienced committees recruited by the SBE.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that

- (i) **the Committee considers the Model Code of Conduct at its meeting on 06 July 2007, and makes recommendations to Council for adoption at the Council meeting on 27 July 2007; and**
- (ii) **the Committee participates in the Standards Board for England's local government pilot projects in respect of the white paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities".**

131. ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

The Committee noted that the sixth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees would take place at the International Convention Centre in Birmingham on 15 and 16 October 2007. Members felt that the Assembly continued to be an invaluable source of training and information, and all expressed a wish to attend. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that he would make the necessary funding arrangements, and explore the possibility of the Hereford and Worcester Combined Fire and Rescue Authority making a financial contribution for those members who sat on its Standards Committee.

In addition, members noted that Mr. Richard Gething and Mr. David Stevens would represent the Committee at the Standards Board for England Roadshow to be held in Birmingham on 14 June 2007.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that the Standards Committee attends the sixth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees in Birmingham on 15 an 16 October 2007.

132. JOINT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS - LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY: FOURTH PROGRESS REPORT

Members noted an extract from the report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, in respect of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill. The Joint Committee had accepted the Standards Board for England's recommendation that "certain behaviour [of councillors] outside official duties should continue to be regulated, but that this should be restricted only to matters that would be regarded as unlawful." In addition, the Joint Committee had requested an amendment to the Bill to minimise the risk of incompatibility with councillors' human rights. The amendment provided that "private conduct" shall be within the scope of the Code of Conduct only where it results in a criminal conviction which is relevant to a member's official duties.

RESOLVED: (unanimously) that the report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights (Legislative Scrutiny: Fourth Progress Report) be noted.

133. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ON THE COUNCIL WEBSITE

The Democratic Services Officer reported on progress made with putting ethics and standards pages on the Council's website. The pages required some refining and would then be ready for release.

RESOLVED: (unanimously) that the report be noted.

134. REFERRALS TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE FROM THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services apprised members of progress made with the investigation into SBE Complaint Nos. 17223.07 to 17229.07. He said that the final investigation report would be ready shortly.

RESOLVED: (unanimously) that, in respect of SBE Complaint Nos. 17223.07 to 17229.07, progress on the investigation be noted, and a provisional time and date of 4.30 p.m. on Friday 11 May 2007, be set to consider the final investigation report and whether or not to hold a hearing.

The meeting ended at 3.36 p.m.

CHAIRMAN