

REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Meetings held on 12 February, 09 March and 13 April 2007

Membership:

Robert Rogers (Independent Member) (Chairman); Councillor John Edwards, Councillor John Stone; Richard Gething (Town and Parish Council Representative); John Hardwick (Town and Parish Council Representative); David Stevens (Independent Member).

LOCAL AUTHORITIES (MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT) ORDER 2007

1. We commented on the consultation to the Model Code of Conduct at our meeting on 12 February, and sent our comments to the Department of Communities and Local Government. The text of the new Model Code has now been published and can be found at: <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/20071159.htm>. It will come into force on 03 May 2007, and must be adopted by Local Authorities by November 2007. We will be looking at the Model Code at our next meeting on 06 July 2007, and making recommendations to Council.

HEREFORDSHIRE CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

2. We have reviewed the Code of Corporate Governance, which has also been considered by the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee. We have redrafted the Foreword to the Code to make it simpler and more accessible to the public. We also felt that the Code itself needed to be simpler and shorter if it was to achieve its aims. We will take matters forward in close co-operation with the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.

COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOLS

3. The Committee reviewed the Council's draft Communications Protocols, which will assist the public in knowing who to contact on standards and ethics issues, and will provide guidance to Council members and officers in dealing with the media on such matters. We will produce the final document in laminated form for inclusion in the Standards Committee hearing guidance pack, which is available to all those involved in hearings.

INDUCTION REVIEW GROUP

4. We looked at the work undertaken by the Council's Induction Review Group in respect of the member's induction programme following the May 2007 elections. The Group has completed some excellent work in producing a thorough and helpful introduction to Herefordshire Council. Our Chairman will be contributing to the induction programme on May 11 by giving a talk on standards and ethics, and on the role of the Committee.

STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND BULLETIN 32

5. It has been our regular practice for some time to consider the Standards Board for England bulletins, which contain useful information, case law summaries, guidance, updates and training. Bulletin 32 looks at the Model Code of Conduct in detail, and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill. There are also details of 11 roadshows which will look at the Model Code of Conduct and the introduction of the local filter system, proposed for 2008, which will be a major change in the local government standards framework. Two of our members, Mr David Stevens and Mr Richard Gething, will represent the Standards Committee at the roadshow in Birmingham in June.
6. The Standards Board is also keen to work with us, as an experienced committee, on one of its pilot projects in June this year. The pilot is designed to test and comment on approaches being developed by the Standards Board for England, and our topic is likely to be "Operating the Local Filter". The pilot will involve committee members and key officers.

ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

7. The Annual Assembly of Standards Committees will be held in Birmingham on 15 and 16 October, 2007. This year, it is called "*Down to Detail – Making Local Regulation Work*", and promises to focus in depth on putting local regulation and the revised Code of Conduct into action. This event is always an invaluable source of information and training, and all our members will be attending it at some point over the two days.

TRAINING

8. We will be holding more joint training sessions for Town and Parish Councils with the Herefordshire Association of Local Councils in June and October 2007. We will focus on the implications (and implementation) of the new Code of Conduct.

REFERRALS TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE FROM THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND

9. We have noted the progress made with an investigation into Complaints Nos. 17223.07 to 17229.07, referred to the Standards Committee from the SBE.
10. The Committee met on Friday 9th March 2007 to consider the final report of an Investigation relating to a complaint by Mr Edward Kelly against Councillor John Edwards (Complaint No. SBE 15104.06). We found that there was no failure to follow the Code of Conduct. The full text of the Decision Notice can be located on the Council's website by clicking on "Council Committees" in the Quick Links box on the homepage, and then locating "Standards Committee", and the agenda for 09 March 2007.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE ON THE COUNCIL'S WEBSITE

11. Good progress has been made on the standards and ethics web pages, and it is hoped that they will be "live" by the time of the Council meeting.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

12. All Herefordshire Councillors will now have received our Annual Report for 2006, which describes a wide range of work, focusing on adding value rather than merely activity. We also feel that Herefordshire has an excellent story to tell, which deserves to be known more widely; and we have therefore sent the Report to appropriate national authorities (such as the Standards Board, the Committee on Standards in Public Life, and Ministers) as well as to Town and Parish Councils in the County, and Standards Committees of local authorities in West Mercia.

**ROBERT ROGERS
CHAIRMAN
STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- Agenda papers of the meetings held on 12 February, 09 March and 13 April 2007.