

REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Meeting held on 18 April 2008

Membership:

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

APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATIONS RECEIVED FROM TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILLORS

1. We have granted a dispensation to six members of Lyonshall Parish Council in relation to a housing needs survey and potential affordable housing developments in Lyonshall, and to fourteen members of Kington Town Council in relation to an employment matter.

EMPLOYEE CODE OF CONDUCT AND MEMBERS/OFFICERS PROTOCOL

2. We have considered a first draft of the amended Appendices 12 (Annex 1) and 14 of the Constitution, which relate to the protocol for officer/councillor relations, and the employees' code of conduct, respectively. We will conclude our consideration at our meeting on 04 July.

TRAINING

3. The Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic) is arranging joint training with the Standards Committees of Worcestershire and Shropshire, and the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority and the West Mercia Police Authority. It will focus on the new Code of Conduct and local assessment, and is likely to take place in September/October 2008, thereby allowing time to incorporate all of the materials currently being issued by the Standards Board. This will provide a good opportunity to discuss any joint arrangements with the other Committees taking part (see 5 below)
4. We receive information from the Herefordshire Association of Local Councils (HALC) in respect of its training programme, including lists of councillors attending specific courses. We use this information to help manage risk jointly with HALC, to tailor training to specific areas of need or demand, and to ensure that training is spread as widely as possible.

LOCAL ASSESSMENT

5. The law now provides that, from 08 May 2008, we will take on the task of examining any complaint against a Herefordshire Councillor, or a Parish or Town Councillor in Herefordshire, and deciding whether it should be investigated. This is in addition to our present power to hear and determine cases. The Standards Committee Regulations 2008 (Statutory Instrument 2008 No. 1085) were laid before Parliament the day before our Committee meeting, and the Standards Board for England has issued a toolkit of resources and some supporting guidance. It is possible that this will lead to a significant increase in our workload. In preparation, we will recruit an additional independent member to

satisfy the requirements of local assessment, arrange appropriate training, and formulate joint working arrangements with other local Standards Committees.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

6. Our annual report for 2007 will appear shortly.

SEVENTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

7. Bookings for the Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees are already under way. It will be held at the International Conference Centre in Birmingham on 13 and 14 October 2008, and its theme will be "Delivering the Goods: Local Standards in Action". Its focus will be on meeting the challenges of the new local standards framework, and it will be of particular benefit with the imminent local assessment regime. Five of our members will represent the Committee.

STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND/NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS PILOT PROJECT

8. We were very pleased to hear details of a pilot project which is being conducted by the SBE following agreements between Associations of Local Councils and Standards Committees. The project will run from June to December this year, and will aim to produce a model for compacts between local Associations, Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees through assessing activities such as joint training, informal meetings between Standards Committees and Associations to ensure agreement over application of the Code of Conduct, and the production of joint guidance leaflets. The SBE has selected Herefordshire as one of only six "centres of excellence", as an exemplar of working relationships between the county Association of Local Authorities and both the Monitoring Officer and our Committee, and we congratulate HALC on being instrumental in the project.
9. We already undertake most of the functions suggested by the pilot, and in addition, we will be producing a joint guidance leaflet on Planning matters, and some of our members will be attending parish and town council meetings. The purpose of our attendance will be to answer any questions about the work of the Standards Committee and the local filter, and HALC will publicise this in advance to ensure that our visits are not misconstrued!

DETERMINATIONS BY THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND – 2008

10. We have considered progress reports on current investigations by the Standards Board for England.

ROBERT ROGERS
CHAIRMAN, STANDARDS COMMITTEE

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- Agenda papers of the meeting held on 18 April 2008.