

REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Meeting held on 5 December 2003

Membership:

Robert Rogers (Independent Member) (Chairman); Richard Gething (Town and Parish Council Representative); Councillor John Edwards, Councillor Peter Harling

APPOINTMENT OF NEW MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

- 1 On 25 July 2003 the Council agreed to our proposal that one additional Independent Member and one additional Parish/Town Council representative should be added to the Committee.
- 2 Following advertisement in the local press for the post of independent Member, interviews were held on 20 November 2003 by a Panel comprising the Chairman of the Council, the County Secretary and Solicitor and myself. We recommend to Council the appointment of Mr David Stevens
- 3 Mr Stevens is the Chairman of Herefordshire Young Enterprise and West Mercia Crimestoppers and formerly Chairman of the Area Council of the Herefordshire Chamber of Commerce, and an Independent member of the Police Authority. David Stevens worked for many years with Bulmers' export department. He lives in Hereford City and is married with three grown up children.
- 4 Herefordshire Association of Local Councils (HALC) has put forward Mr John Hardwick as its second representative on the Committee. We endorse his appointment.
- 5 John Hardwick farms in the Fownhope area and is a much respected member of the local community, which he is involved in and has served for many years. He is currently Chairman of the Fownhope Parish Council and a member of the HALC Executive Committee.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: That Mr David Stevens (Independent Member) and Mr John Hardwick (Town and Parish Council Representative) be appointed as members of the Standards Committee.

ELECTIONS 2003

- 6 We are delighted to report that following hard work by the County Secretary and Solicitor and her staff and the Town and Parish Clerks, all Town and Parish Councillors have undertaken to comply with the Code of Conduct and have completed the Register of Financial and Other Interests.

USE OF MEMBER SUPPORT SERVICES – INTERNET, EXTERNAL E-MAIL AND OTHER FACILITIES AND PROTOCOL FOR MEMBER/OFFICER RELATIONS

- 7 At its meeting on 28 April 2003, Council decided that the Draft Protocols for Member/Officer relations and the use of Members Support Services, internal, and external e-mail and other facilities, should be accepted in principle but be re-submitted to Council for adoption following further consultation on the detailed terms. We have sought the views of the Group Leaders and the Chief Executive's Management Team. We now put forward a revised Protocol for Member/officer relations seeking to give clearer guidance for Members, and especially new Members elected in May.

- 8 On the Protocol dealing with Members' use of the internet, external email and other facilities, we have set in hand further work, aimed particularly at drawing on best practice from other authorities. We will bring forward a revised draft as soon as may be.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: That the revised protocol set out in the Appendix to this report be adopted.

TRAINING

- 9 A Seminar for town and parish councillors was held in conjunction with the Herefordshire Association of Local Councils on 20 November. The Seminar was, very successful and will become at least an annual event. In addition, the Herefordshire Association of Local Councils will arrange further training about the Code of Conduct in Spring 2004. On 6 February 2004 we will be holding a joint event with Worcestershire County Council's Standards Committee and the Combined Fire Authority Standards Committee. This will cover the handling of complaints under the powers conferred on the Committees by the Local Authorities (Code of Conduct) (Local Determinations) (Regulations) 2003.

GUIDANCE FOR MONITORING OFFICERS AND STANDARDS COMMITTEES AND OTHER ISSUES

- 10 We have considered guidance from the Standards Board for England on the conduct of local determination hearings. We have some concerns about apparent inconsistencies in penalties imposed by Adjudication Panels for similar offences, and we will keep this under review.
- 11 We note that the Third Annual Assembly of Standards Committees will take place on 13/14 September 2004 at the International Conference Centre in Birmingham.

INVESTIGATIONS BY THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND

- 12 We have considered a report on the results of investigations by the Standards Board for England into complaints against Town and Parish Councillors.

**ROBERT ROGERS
CHAIRMAN
STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Agenda papers of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 5 December 2003