

REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Meeting held on 02 December 2006

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).

APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATIONS RECEIVED FROM TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILLORS

1. We have granted dispensations to four members of Much Cowarne Group Parish Council in relation to their roles as trustees of Burley Gate Village Hall.

KINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

2. We noted progress made with Kington Town Council's programme of support and training following the issue of a Public Interest Report by the District Auditor in respect of the town council's conduct of business. We have been receiving a series of regular reports, and the Chairman and the former County Secretary and Solicitor spent a day with the town council in April 2005. Recently, every Kington town councillor has received one-to-one training from the Herefordshire Association of Local Council's Chief Executive. This is an approach that HALC has adopted in instances when the Adjudication Panel for England or the Standards Committee has recommended further training for individual members. We welcome this.
3. The County Secretary and Solicitor has sent copies of all relevant reports, minutes, and correspondence in respect of the town council to the Standards Board for England, following recommendations made by the Adjudication Panel for England in February 2005. We are awaiting a response from the Standards Board about whether any further action is required.

WEST MERCIA INDEPENDENT MEMBERS' FORUM

4. After this report was produced, Herefordshire Council hosted the West Mercia Independent Members' Forum at Brockington on Friday 03 February 2006, and the Chairman will provide an oral update at Council. The Forum is open to all independent members of standards committees in the region, including fire and police authorities.
5. The main agenda item was a discussion on local hearings, which gave members an opportunity to exchange information and experiences. The Chairman gave a presentation on the Standards Committee's experiences of conducting local hearings, and Kevin O'Keefe, the Legal Practice Manager addressed the Forum on conducting local investigations.

DETERMINATIONS BY THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND

6. We have considered progress reports on current investigations by the Standards Board for England.
7. Arising from our usual review of previous hearings, we considered the fact that in circumstances when a councillor refuses to undertake recommended training, the Standards Board and we have no direct powers of enforcement. As a result, we have agreed that, when we recommend training at future hearings, we will consider making the imposition/non-imposition of a penalty conditional on the councillor undertaking the training.

LOCAL INVESTIGATION

8. The Standards Board has referred a complaint against a local councillor to Herefordshire Council for investigation under the provisions of the Local Authorities (Code of Conduct)(Local Determinations) Regulations 2003 (as amended). The investigation had been carried out by the Legal Practice Manager, and the matter now falls to be decided by our Committee.

**ROBERT ROGERS
CHAIRMAN
STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- Agenda papers of the meeting held on 02 December 2005.