

Medway Council
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

18 MARCH 2003

7pm to 8pm

RECORD OF THE MEETING

PRESENT:

Committee members: Councillors Buckwell, Councillor Coomber (parish representative), Michael Coulson (independent member), Alan Povey (independent member) and Councillor Mrs Julie Shaw.

In attendance: Councillor Swaby

5213 RECORD OF THE MEETING

The record of the meeting held on 21 January 2003 was agreed and signed by the chair as correct subject to the removal of the word "councillor" before Alan Povey on the attendance list and to the word "principal" being replaced with the word "principle" in the second paragraph of minute 5018 (General update on the code of conduct issues - referral of adjudications by the Standards Board for England).

5214 BEST PRACTICE UPDATE

Discussion:

The Monitoring Officer advised members of recent developments on the introduction of good practice codes for regulating the conduct of planning applications and presented to members a model members' planning code of good practice produced by the Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors.

Members felt that aspects of this model were highly legalistic and it was noted that the model to be adopted by Medway should be in plain English.

Decision:

Further examples of members' planning codes should be presented to the next Standards Committee for consideration.

5215 MEMBERSHIP OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Discussion:

The Monitoring Officer presented a report asking members to consider recommendations to council on the level of independent and parish council representation to the Standards Committee. The Monitoring Officer informed members that the Standards Board for England had emphasised that substitutes should not be used on Standards Committees. Members considered that the appropriate nominees for the forthcoming municipal year should be the present representative and substitute. Thereafter nominations should be made by the Rural Liaison Committee. The Monitoring Officer advised that the Section 66 Regulations in respect of the determination of local complaints were expected by autumn 2003 and that it would be only after these recommendations had come into place that it would be possible to predict the future workload of the Standards Committee. It was emphasised that there was a need to publicise the work of the Standards Board especially after the Section 66 Regulations had been published.

Decision:

- (a) That council be recommended to increase the number of parish council representatives from one to two members
- (b) To recommend to council that a further independent member be recruited to the Standards Committee increasing the membership to four independent members.

5215 GENERAL UPDATE

(A) **Standards Board conference**

Discussion:

At the meeting on 21 January 2003 it was agreed to send the following nominees to the Standards Board conference in Birmingham on 9 and 10 June 2003:

- the Monitoring Officer;
- a Medway Council member of the Standards Committee;
- an independent member - member nominated;
- depending on the content of the programme, a parish member.

The Monitoring Officer circulated the programme for the conference and noted that there was no obvious parish council element.

It was noted that there had been little advisory material provided by the Standards Board for England for parish councillors. The Monitoring Officer reported that the Standards Board was in the process of producing a video specific to parish councillors.

Decision:

That the number of Medway Council members of the Standards Committee attending the conference should be increased to two and that Mr Mike Coulson (independent chair) should also attend the national conference in Birmingham.

(B) **Case reporting - Standards Board website**

Discussion:

At the previous meeting, members of the committee expressed concern at the level of detail given to identify members on the board's website, particularly where complaints against them were dismissed. As a consequence the chair wrote to the Standards Board noting the Standards Committee's objection to both the naming of the person about who the complaint has been made and the complainant where a complaint has been dismissed. The Monitoring Officer explained that whilst the Standards Board were taking steps to anonymise complaints they were not inclined to anonymise complaints of people complained of even where there is the finding that the code has been breached.

Decision:

That the chair of the Standards Committee write again to the Standards Board for England reiterating the Standards Committee's concerns stating that the names of people complained of should only be detailed on the board's website only with the complainee's consent and that members of Medway's Standards Committee would be raising their concerns at the Standards Board's conference in Birmingham on 9 and 10 June 2003.

Chair

Date

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Committee Co-ordinator

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