

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Standards Committee was held on 4 February 2005

PRESENT: G Fell (Chair)

Councillors Clark, J Jones, T Ward and Williams

Independent Members:
W Anderson and D Middleton

Parish Council Representative:
Councillor I Bruce

OFFICIALS: M Braithwaite, C Davies, R G Long, D Robinson

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Brady and B Taylor

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations.

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 January 2004 were approved as a correct record.

CODE OF CONDUCT – LOCAL DETERMINATION

Members received a report advising them of regulations that came into force on 4 November 2004, that amended the 2003 regulations. The regulations provided for the Monitoring Officer to carry out investigations into less serious alleged breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct referred by Ethical Standards Officers appointed by the Standards Board for England.

The Committee at its meeting on 27 January 2004, agreed in advance of the regulations, a procedure for dealing with such allegations, it was not therefore intended at this stage to amend the agreed procedure, other than if it does not accord with Government guidance or good practice.

ORDERED as follows:

1. That Council adopt the procedure agreed at the Standards Committee on 27 January 2004.
2. That the Monitoring Officer, after consultation with the Chair, be authorised to amend the procedure to comply with good practice.

MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT – COUNCIL EMPLOYEES

Members received a report enclosing a copy of the Council's response to the Government's consultation paper "A Model Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees". The consultation paper sought comments on the scope and content of the draft Code of Conduct to be included in the Council's Constitution and would form part of employees' terms and conditions of employment. The Members' Office Manager outlined the main aspects of the report which had been submitted to and approved by the Corporate Affairs Committee.

ORDERED that the Council's response to the consultation be endorsed.

RICHARDSON CASE – DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services reported in connection with advice issued to all Members of the Council in relation a Court of Appeal judgement in respect of a North Yorkshire

County Council councillor, Councillor Richardson. The briefing note, a copy of which was appended to the report, clarified the position as to whether a Member's individual private rights override their public duty. The advice issued stated that where a Member had a prejudicial interest in the matter to be considered, whether or not they were a member of the committee, i.e. attending as a ward councillor or a private citizen, they must declare the interest and leave the meeting.

NOTED

FREEMASONS – DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services reported in connection with advice issued to all Members of the Council in relation to revised advice received from the Standards Board concerning registration of interests relating to Freemasons.

NOTED

MEMBERS' DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Council in 2000 signed up to the I&DeA Member Development Charter and introduced in 2001 its first Member Development Strategy last updated in 2002/2003.

The North East Regional Employers' Organisation (NEREO) and I&DeA had agreed jointly to promote a new North East Regional Charter for Member Development. Councils in the regions were asked to consider whether to sign up to the new Charter from November 2004. In doing so the Council would be required to commit to the following specific requirements and be required to meet a minimum set of standards:

COMMITMENT TO MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

- Top political and managerial leadership, and commitment to the development of elected Members
- Policy Statement approved by the Council
- Equality of opportunity and access to Learning and Development
- Member Development Budget
- Officer resource and support
- Dissemination of learning by Members

STRATEGIC APPROACH TO MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

- Linkage to Council's Corporate Plan
- Member led strategy
- Members' roles clearly set out
- Process for identification of needs at individual and Council wide level
- Structured approach to promoting development opportunities
- Strategy for Members' induction
- Addressing political leadership and team development
- Members' learning and development plan in place
- Addressing development priorities
- Identifying what development activities should achieve
- Taking account of access to development opportunities

Councils would be offered advice, assistance, mentoring and other forms of support. Charter Status would be awarded for three years followed by re-assessment. The £850 cost to the Council could be met from the current Member Development budget.

In 2003, a Member/Officer Member Development Working Group was established in order to ensure the proper involvement of Members both in the continual revision of the Member Development Strategy, and in planning the Member Development Programme.

A Draft Member Development Strategy had now been agreed by the Member Development Working Group and, following consideration by this Committee would be presented to Council for approval.

The Member Development Strategy linked with the People Strategy currently being developed and was out to consultation. The Member Development Strategy would also pave the way to looking at obtaining Investor in People (IIP) for elected Members, which was a medium term goal in respect of both the Member Development and the Council's People Strategy.

The Standards Committee had a legal requirement to oversee the training and development of Members in respect of the Members' Code of Conduct. The Member Development Working Group recommended that this role should be extended so that the Committee had an oversight of all Member development matters. In order to achieve this, all amendments and updates to the Member Development Strategy would be referred to the Standards Committee for approval. In addition, information reports relating to the Member Development Programme, and attendance of Members at training and development events would be presented to the Committee on a regular basis.

The Members' Office Manager pointed out that the Standards Board for England had been previously been approached with a view to arranging a training event for Members on probity and ethics matters, they were however unable to assist. Further efforts would be made over the next few months to pursue alternative options. It was confirmed that should an event be arranged invitations would be extended to elected Members, non elected Members of the Standards Committee and Parish Councillors.

ORDERED that the draft Member Development Strategy be endorsed and submitted to Council for approval.

CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services presented a report requesting approval to amendments made to the Council's Standing Orders in relation to Contracts which had recently been revised to ensure they were updated and reflected current practices. The officer outlined the main areas of change and advised that the document, a copy of which was appended to the report, had been placed on the Council's website.

ORDERED that the revised draft Standing Orders be approved.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE – INDEPENDENT MEMBERS – TERM OF OFFICE

Independent Members of the Committee were reminded that their three-year term of office was due to expire and that arrangements would be made for future appointments. The Director of Legal and Democratic Services indicated that he would write shortly to those affected. It was noted that current members would be eligible for re-appointment.

NOTED