

EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Standards Committee **Date:** 16 October 2007

Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 8.20 pm

Members Present: Ms M Marshall (Independent Member) (Chairman), G Weltch (Independent Member), M Wright (Independent Member) and Mrs P Smith (Epping Forest Council Appointee), Councillor B Surtees and Councillor Mrs D Borton (Parish/Town Council Appointee), Councillor B Surtees (Town/Parish Council Deputy)

Other Councillors:

Apologies: Councillor Mrs J H Whitehouse (Epping Forest Council Appointee)

Officers Present: C O'Boyle (Director of Corporate Support Services), I Willett (Assistant to the Chief Executive), G Lunnun (Democratic Services Manager) and S G Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

14. MINUTES

The Chairman advised that she had sent, on behalf of the Committee, a letter to Parish Councillor Jason Salter expressing appreciation for the work he had undertaken in relation to the Standards Committee over the past six years.

The Monitoring Officer reported that the Local Government and Public Participation in Health Bill was now expected to be enacted in January 2008.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 July 2007 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

16. PLANNING PROTOCOL

The Monitoring Officer reported that local planning agents, district councillors and parish and town councillors had been consulted on suggested changes to the Planning Protocol to accord with the new Code of Conduct. In addition views had been sought on the Council's website.

The Committee considered responses made to the consultation exercise.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the amendments made to the Planning Protocol to reflect the representations received be agreed;
- (2) That in addition, the following amendments be made to the Planning Protocol.
 - (a) amendment of paragraph 22.1 to refer only to councillors and officers;
 - (b) amendment of paragraph 22.2 to refer to all the staff in Planning Services, spouses and partners;
 - (c) deletion of the last sentence in paragraph 22.2;
 - (d) clarification of the first two boxes in Appendix 1;
 - (e) clarification of paragraph 7.2 to state that members of the Cabinet are responsible for bringing forward planning applications on behalf of the Council; and
 - (f) amendments to be made by the Monitoring Officer to correct typographical errors and to ensure consistency throughout the document;
- (3) That the amended Planning Protocol be recommended for adoption by the Council at its meeting on 18 December 2007;
- (4) That following adoption of the amended Planning Protocol, the Monitoring Officer send copies to all district councillors and to the clerks of parish and town councils and seek their views on the need for further training in relation to the Protocol; and
- (5) That the Monitoring Officer produce a guidance note for the clerks of parish and town councils in relation to the requirements on dual-hatted councillors, in particular regarding their involvement in considering planning applications at parish/town council meetings.

17. NEW CODE OF CONDUCT

The Monitoring Officer reported that at the last meeting, the Committee had noted that the District Council had adopted the new Code of Conduct, without alteration, on 28 June 2007. At that meeting the Committee had requested that a progress report be submitted to this meeting on the adoption of the new Code by parish/town councils and on completion of new registrations of interest by district and parish/town councillors.

The Monitoring Officer reported that notification of adoption of the new Code had been received from all 24 parish/town councils in the district and that an appropriate notice had been published in a local newspaper.

The Committee noted that following adoption of the new Code, all district councillors had completed and returned new registrations of interest forms. Copies of new forms had also been received from all of the members of 17 of the parish/town councils in the district. In relation to the remaining seven parish/town councils, the majority of forms had been received although in some cases it had been necessary to seek further returns as the forms used had not been compliant with the new Code. The

Monitoring Officer emphasised that the forms outstanding were as a result of administrative errors or submission of the wrong forms. There had been no opposition expressed about the need to complete new forms, officers were liaising with parish/town council clerks and the outstanding returns were expected shortly.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the progress report on the adoption of the new Code by parish/town councils and on completion of registrations of interest by district and parish/town councillors be noted; and

(2) That the approach being taken by the Monitoring Officer in relation to the outstanding registration of interest forms from parish/town councillors be supported.

18. CODE OF CONDUCT - APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATION

The Monitoring Officer advised that at the last meeting of the Committee consideration had been given to five applications from members of the District Council's Cabinet for dispensation to take part in a decision regarding the acceptance of tenders for the provision of bed and breakfast accommodation to house homeless persons. The Committee had agreed to hold a special meeting, if necessary, in order to consider possible applications from the remaining three members of the Cabinet.

The Monitoring Officer reported that no further applications had been received and it had become clear that the Cabinet quorum had been lost. In order to resolve the issue the Cabinet had delegated the decision to a Portfolio Holder without a prejudicial interest to declare. As a result there had been no need for this Committee to take any further action.

RESOLVED:

That the position be noted.

19. ALLEGATIONS ABOUT THE CONDUCT OF DISTRICT AND PARISH/TOWN COUNCILLORS - CURRENT POSITION

The Committee noted the current position of allegations made to the Standards Board for England regarding district and parish/town councillors.

20. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted the calendar for 2007/08 provided for meetings of the Committee on 26 February 2008 and 8 April 2008.

21. STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND DVD - "THE CODE UNCOVERED"

The Committee noted that as part of their continued support, the Standards Board for England had produced a DVD, which used a fictional planning application dispute to illustrate the key changes to the revised model Code of Conduct. The Monitoring Officer reported that the Council had received one copy of the DVD and that further copies could be ordered from the Standards Board at a charge of £38.00 per extra copy.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Monitoring Officer purchase an additional six copies of the DVD for loaning to parish/town councils;
- (2) That the Monitoring Officer make arrangements for district councillors on planning committees to view the DVD; and
- (3) That the DVD be shown at or immediately before the next meeting of the Local Councils' Liaison Committee.

CHAIRMAN