

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
TUESDAY 1 FEBRUARY, 2011 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK
PART 1

PRESENT:

Betteridge, Mr. R. (Chairman), Independent Member

Councillors:

Ansell, Mrs. P.A.
Bennett, Mrs. D.J.

Burnett, J.

Elliott, Mr. M.

Independent Member

Allen, Mrs. M.

Cannock Wood Parish Council

19. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Mr. M. King, Independent Member, (Vice Chairman), Mrs. J. Chapman, Independent Member, Mr. G. Sindrey, Independent Member, Councillors J. Rowley and A. Williams and Councillor A. Pearson, Hednesford Town Council.

20. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members

No declarations of interests were declared.

21. Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 November, 2010 be approved as a correct record.

22. Proposed Abolition of Standards Board Regime and Implications for Local Standards

Mr. A. Welch, Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer reported that the Localism Bill had been published before Christmas which confirmed that the Standards Board for England and the national regime would be abolished. This would therefore mean that the requirement for all Councils to have a Standards Committee would be removed under the Bill, although Councils would be free to have a voluntary Code of Conduct and Standards Committee if they wished.

He reported that if Councils chose to have a voluntary Standards Committee they would have no power to impose any sanction or suspend Members but could only censure the member.

The Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer indicated that this information also applied to Parish/Town Councils who could also decide if they wished to have a voluntary Code of Conduct and Standards Committee.

The Chairman was keen to know who would decide on whether or not the Council would implement the voluntary Standards Committee and Code. The Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer advised that the Committee could make a recommendation to Council prior to its abolition.

Concern was raised amongst the Committee that if a complaint was received through a voluntary Standards Committee, they would not have any powers to make any sanctions. The Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer advised that there would be a national definition of what an interest was and a failure to declare an interest, which would need to be fairly significant would be a criminal offence.

The Committee agreed that there should be a voluntary Code of Conduct and Standards Committee, however concern was expressed that if a member of the public raised a complaint how would it be dealt with. The Council Solicitor and Monitoring Office advised the Committee that with no national appeals mechanism Standards Committees findings could only be challenged in the Courts. The Standards Committees findings would be made public and it would be for the electorate to judge whether the member should continue to serve at the next election.

The Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer indicated that the Bill was likely to be agreed either in the Summer or early autumn and a report would then need to be submitted to Council to decide on future arrangements. He then provided a timeline for Members on matters that were currently being investigated and how they would be dealt with following the passing of the Bill.

The Chairman commented that it could be more effective to have a Staffordshire voluntary Code. The Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer was of the opinion that there was no reason why a joint Standards Committee with Stafford Borough Council could not work, especially in light of both Councils sharing services.

The Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer advised that there would be little point in further training with regard to the National Code of Conduct. He advised however that Members would still need to abide by the National Code until it was abolished. Therefore, he would be available to newly elected Members following the Election to explain the provisions.

23. Any other Business

There was no other business to report.

(The meeting closed at 4.30 p.m.).

CHAIRMAN