

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

ETHICS AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

THE EARL BALDWIN SUITE, DUKE HOUSE, CLENSMORE STREET,
KIDDERMINSTER

6TH APRIL 2011 (5.30 PM)

Present:

Independent Members: Rev J A Cox (Chairman) and Mr J T Hipkiss.

Councillors: A Buckley, C Nicholls, M Price, K Stokes, J Thomas and S Williams.

Parish Members: Councillors: R Hobson and J Swift.

Observers: There were no members present as observers.

ES.13 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: R Bishop, H Dyke, P Dyke, D Godwin, M J Hart, T Ingham and Mr R Reynolds (Independent Member).

ES.14 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor A Buckley was appointed as a substitute for Councillor D Godwin. Councillor M Price was appointed as a substitute for Councillor R Bishop. Councillor S Williams was appointed as a substitute for Councillor M Hart.

ES.15 Declaration of Interests

Councillors J Thomas and K J Stokes declared a personal interest in agenda item number 5 – Outcome of Hearings Sub-Committee Meeting as the subject of the report is a member of their political group.

ES.16 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd February 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the addition of Councillors R Hobson and J Swift being added to the attendance list.

ES.17 Outcome of Hearings Sub-Committee

A report was considered from the Monitoring Officer that informed Members of the Committee of the outcome of the recent Hearings Sub-Committee. The Chairman drew Members' attention to the decision that had been reached namely that the Member had breached the Code of Conduct and was required to attend training on the Code before resuming committee work.

The Monitoring Officer commented that the Members on the Hearings Sub-Committee had been objective in their deliberations and in reaching their final conclusion. Further it was noted that the recommendation that additional training be carried out had occurred and it had been favourably received.

Decision: The report be noted.

ES.18 The Localism Bill and its Implications for Ethics and Standards

A report was considered from the Monitoring Officer that gave Members feedback on the Localism Bill and its implications for Ethics and Standards.

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that since the report had been written she had received further details about what may finally be agreed in the Localism Bill. The Bill would require Members to register and declare personal interests and not use their position improperly for personal gain. If a Member failed to do this it would be a criminal offence and a fine of up to £5,000 could be imposed. There was still a mandatory requirement for local authorities as part of their corporate governance to promote and maintain a high standard of ethical governance. In the Nolan Report which was the precursor to the current standards regime, it recommended that the conduct of Members in public life should be higher than the man in the street. The Nolan principles were still contained within the Localism Bill.

The Monitoring Officer had attended a meeting with other Monitoring officers in Worcestershire and wider and the consensus of opinion on the future of ethics and standards was not to reinvent the wheel but possibly to simplify the Code for all Councils. The current Code was not easy to interpret and it was perceived that it could be made clearer. However she commented that she felt that having a Code to follow had worked for Wyre Forest and the public had responded positively to the Council having a Code and Independent members on its Ethics and Standards Committee.

The Localism Bill provided for the Council to decide to adopt a new voluntary Code of Conduct. If the Council were to adopt a voluntary Code of Conduct this would then become mandatory. A mechanism for investigating complaints would be required but this could be simplified.

It was hoped by November 2011 that the future for ethics and standards would be clearer and the Bill would be in its final format. It was important for the Council to retain its Ethics and Standards Committee so that there was a forum in which recommendations could be made to Council as to how this Council would form its ethical framework.

A debate ensued amongst members about the future of Ethics and Standards in Wyre Forest. The general consensus was that the Council had always demonstrated very high ethical standards and that it should continue to have a standards framework.

Decision: The report be noted.

ES.19 Annual Report 2010/2011

A report was considered from the Monitoring Officer that appraised the Ethics and Standards Committee of the Annual Report to be submitted to Annual Council in May 2011.

Decision: The report be agreed and Included on the agenda for the annual meeting of Council to be held on 18th May 2011.

ES.20 Thank You

The Chairman advised Members that the Principal Committee Officer would be leaving the authority shortly and thanked her for all the support she had given to the Committee.

The meeting ended at 6.05 pm.