

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Date: Thursday 7 February 2008**

**Time: 6.00 p.m.**

**Place: Autun Room, Daneshill House, Stevenage**

**Present:** Stewart Gillies - Independent Member  
(Chair), M. Downing, CC, Mrs. J.E. Lloyd, M.  
Notley  
Independent: Ananda Hale

Agenda Item:

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**In Attendance:**

**Start/End Time:** Start Time: 6.00 p.m.  
End Time: 7.25 p.m.

### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no apologies for absence and no declarations of interest.

### **2 MINUTES - Tuesday 14th June 2007**

It was RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 14th June, 2007 having been circulated, be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Following a question relating to the rules regarding declaration of gifts and hospitality, the Borough Solicitor advised that those Councillors who were Members of the Stevenage Homes Limited (SHL) Board should declare gifts and hospitality with both SHL, if the value was over £40 and also Stevenage Borough Council if the value was over £25.

### **3 THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH ACT 2007 - CHANGES TO THE STANDARDS REGIME FOR MEMBERS**

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report detailing the provisions in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act relating to the role of Standards Committees. He also submitted for approval a draft response to the Consultation Paper issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government on draft regulations made under those provisions.

Members were advised that following the implementation of this new Act, the handling of all complaints would be delegated to local Standards Committees which would mean that the Committees will be responsible for receiving allegations that a Member had breached the Code of Conduct and deciding whether any action needed to be taken. The new regime had implications for the size and structure of the Standards Committee which would be addressed by the Council in time for the implementation of the Act.

Following discussions, the Borough Solicitor agreed to look into the proposed increase in the membership of the Committee and how the sub-committees should be convened. Members also requested that the vacancy for the third Independent Member be publicly advertised in the usual way .

It was RESOLVED:-

1. That the proposal to increase the size of the Standards Committee to nine Members with the appointment of an additional independent Member be approved.
2. That suitable training and preparation for the implementation of the new Act be arranged for Standards Committee Members and key officers.
3. That in consultation with the Chair of this Committee, the Borough Solicitor respond to the Consultation Paper "Orders and Regulations Relating to the Conduct of Local Authority Members in England" as set out in Appendix 1 with the minor changes suggested by the Committee
4. That a future report on the Regulations and any guidance be submitted to this Committee after the regulations have been issued.

#### **4 THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT STATISTICS 2006/7**

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report reviewing the Ombudsman complaint statistics for 2006/07. Members were pleased to note that the Ombudsman had welcomed the continued reduction in complaints over the past two years. The majority of the complaints were housing related but there had been a reduction from previous years. Members were advised that although Stevenage Homes Limited had now been established, the Ombudsman's view was that as the housing function still rested ultimately with the Council, he would continue to raise complaints to the Council in the usual way.

Members were concerned, however, that the relevant Ward Members and Executive Portfolio Holders were currently not aware of Ombudsman complaints when they had been lodged. It was agreed that Councillor Joan Lloyd, Executive Member for Resources and Member of this Committee be sent details of complaints as they are received.

It was RESOLVED that the report be noted.

#### **5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None

#### **6 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

None

#### **7 URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None