

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Date:** Tuesday, 24th January, 2006

**Time:** 6.00pm

**Place:** Kadoma Room, Daneshill House

**Present:** Members: Mr D. Morgan (Independent Chair), Mr S. Gillies (Independent member), Councillors, Mrs J.E. Lloyd, M. Notley, K. Vale

**In Attendance:**

**Start/End Time:** Start Time: 6.00pm  
End Time: 7.30pm

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

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

### 2 **MINUTES - Tuesday, 31st May, 2005**

Minutes attached

It was RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Tuesday, 31st May 2005, be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

### 3 **STANDARDS OF CONDUCT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT: THE FUTURE**

Report attached

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report examining the Government's current views on the future of the conduct regime for both Members and Officers.

The Committee were advised of the structure and procedural changes to the New Ethical Framework, which would require an Act of Parliament. These will be included in the next Local Government Bill and include:-

\* All complaints against Councillors to be made to the Monitoring Officer rather than to the Standards Board.

\* Local Authorities would refer to the Standards Board complaints which they feel unable to investigate due to the seriousness of the allegation.

\* The Standards Board would concentrate on monitoring and improving the effectiveness of the system and investigating only the most serious allegations.

The proposed changes which could be made by Statutory Instrument and therefore introduced earlier included:-

- \* A new offence of bullying should be added to the Code.
- \* The Code should contain an exception for disclosure of confidential information where such disclosure was in the public interest.
- \* Outside official duties, only unlawful conduct should be regarded as likely to bring the Member's office or authority into disrepute.
- \* The offence of misuse of public resources should be limited to serious misuse.
- \* The range of interests, which require to be registered, should be reduced.
- \* The code should redefine 'friend' as a 'close personal associate'.
- \* Interests arising from Membership of another public body, a charity, or local pressure group, should not prevent members from discharging their representative role.
- \* Standards Committees should have wider discretion to grant dispensations.
- \* The current £25 threshold for declarations of gifts and hospitality should be retained.

Members also noted the draft model code of conduct for Local Authority Employees.

Following discussion of the response, it was agreed that the Borough Solicitor write to the Government to express the concerns of the Committee particularly relating to the following:-

- \* Whether Members can be allowed to declare interests in advance of meetings and in writing.
- \* The current threshold of £25 for the declaration of gifts and hospitality is too low and needs to be revised.
- \* The role of the Monitoring Officer and their capacity to take on the extra workload the proposals would make.
- \* The wording in point 9 of the Employee's Code of Conduct relating to appointment of staff needs revising as the wording is inconsistent.

It was RESOLVED:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Borough Solicitor write to the Government expressing the Committee's concerns outlined above.

**4 URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

The Borough Solicitor advised that he would be issuing an advert in the local press for David Morgan's replacement as of May 2006.

- b) An additional meeting of the Standards Committee to be arranged for Thursday, 9th March at 6.00p.m.

**5 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

None.

**6 URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**CHAIR**