

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

21st August 2001

PRESENT:-

District Council Members

Councillor Rose (Chair) and Councillor Bale.

Independent Members

Mr. P. Dawn, Mr. L. Taylor and Mr. D. R. Williams.

SC/1. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR**

It was agreed to defer the appointment of a Vice-Chair until a future Meeting when all Members had been appointed and were present.

SC/2. **INTRODUCTION TO THE DELIBERATIONS OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Members received a summary of the Local Government Act 2000 in connection with the modernising of local government. In particular, reference was made to the conduct of Members, the establishment of a Standards Committee and standards for parish councils. The Committee received an extract from the Relevant Authorities (General Principles) Order 2001 relating to selflessness, honesty and integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, personal judgement, respect for others, duty to uphold the law, stewardship and leadership. From these principles, a model Code of Conduct would be prepared. The Legal and Members' Services Manager outlined the provisions relating to Members' interests and it was noted that at the present time, only a model Code of Conduct for Members had been issued in February by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) in the form of a consultation paper. The District Council's Modernising Local Government Working Panel had submitted a response to this consultation document and the Legal and Members' Services Manager reported that he had recently spoken to the appropriate office at the DETR and it was expected that the Code would be issued within the next month. This would supersede the current National Code of Local Government Conduct and should simplify and clarify issues. It was reported that the model Code would contain mandatory and optional sections and this Committee would consider breaches of the Code by Members.

Reference was made to Article 8 of the Council's constitution, which had been recently adopted. This Article covered the form and composition of the Standards Committee, together with its role and function. It was noted that the Standards Committee would be composed of eight Members. The District Council would appoint three Members, including the Chair of the Council who would Chair the Committee. Three independent Members would serve on the Committee and the remaining two Members would be from Parish Councils within the Council's area. These Parish Members were to be appointed in association with the Derbyshire Association of Local Councils

and final nominations were expected shortly. Accordingly, it was anticipated that the Parish Members would be available to attend the next Meeting.

Following a query by a Member, the Legal and Members' Services Manager advised that it was anticipated that the Committee would meet four times per annum but it may be more often, depending on referrals from the Standards Board. The Standards Board was expected to advise on the operation of Standards Committees and the Legal and Members' Services Manager also held the post of Monitoring Officer with a responsibility to report on illegal activities. It was anticipated that the role of Monitoring Officer would be extended to work closely with the Committee and it was noted that the Committee may have some limited powers of punishment, although further Regulations were still awaited. However, it was important to recognise that the Committee would have no sanctions against employees of the Council, for which an internal disciplinary procedure was in place.

The Legal and Members' Services Manager would be writing to all Parish Councils and Meetings to ensure that they were aware of the legislation surrounding the establishment of a Standards Committee. When the Parish Members had been appointed, it was intended to arrange appropriate training sessions, possibly in connection with the Code of Conduct and matters relating to evidence.

When the model Code had been issued, the Council would have a responsibility to adopt some form of Code within six months, following which all Members of the Council would be required to sign to the Code within two months. Access to Information rules did not apply to the Standards Committee in their entirety and Regulations had recently been issued on this matter. Amongst other things, these provided that the Council was not required to release publicly the names and addresses of the independent Members of the Committee.

It was anticipated that the next Meeting of the Committee would be held during October 2001 and any relevant information would be forwarded to Members in due course. In the meantime, the Legal and Members' Services Manager suggested that Members may wish to peruse the documents circulated and contact him in the event of any queries.

C.H. ROSE

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 7.20 p.m.