

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

**Held on Tuesday, 15 April 2008 at 2.15 pm in
Norfolk Rooms, Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

PRESENT

Mrs J. Jenkins	Mr B.D Rayner
Mr D.S. Myers	Mr F.J. Sharpe
Mrs M. Oechsle JP	Mr M. Whittley
Mr M.D. Eveling JP	Mr G. Ridgway

In Attendance

Susan Allen	- Standards Officer
John Chinnery	- Solicitor & Standards Consultant
Helen McAleer	- Committee Officer

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17/08 CHAIRMAN (AGENDA ITEM 1)

In the absence of the Chairman the Solicitor and Standards Consultant explained that the changes brought about under Part 10 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, which came into force on 1 April 2008, lead to a requirement to elect a new Independent Chairman for the ensuing year.

Mrs Joan Jenkins was nominated and seconded. No other nominations were made.

RESOLVED that Mrs Jenkins be elected Chairman for the ensuing year.

Mrs Jenkins assumed the Chair. She immediately suggested that Item 7 be taken as the next item.

18/08 NEW MEMBER (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Mr George Ridgway was welcomed as a new independent lay Member of the Committee. All Committee members introduced themselves.

19/08 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

20/08 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 3)

Apologies for absence were received from Mr D Williams.

21/08 DECLARATION OF INTEREST (AGENDA ITEM 5)

The following declaration was made:-

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Mr D Myers – personal interest in regard to Agenda Item 10 on the grounds that he knew the Member of Watton Town Council who had been subject to the investigation and also the circumstances of that case.

22/08 SEVENTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Chairman explained that she had attended the Assembly twice and had found it very useful. Although it was quite costly at approximately £700 per person, it was money well spent.

It was felt that new members of the Committee in particular would benefit from attending the Assembly.

Now that the number on the Committee had increased from four to nine it was suggested that the number of places available should be increased. Previously two members had attended each year, which had represented 50% of the Committee.

Concerns were expressed about the possibility of finding funding for more than two attendees. However, the Solicitor & Standards Consultant considered that now that there was a corporate budget for training, funding might be available.

The Standards Officer agreed to investigate resources to finance the three other members who wished to attend. The Solicitor & Standards Consultant said that with the introduction of the new system it was important for an officer to attend.

RESOLVED that the two new independent members, Mr Eveling and Mr Ridgway would take precedence and be nominated to attend this year but that three other Member places would be allocated if funding was available.

23/08 ORDERS AND REGULATIONS RELATING TO THE CONDUCT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY MEMBERS IN ENGLAND - UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Solicitor & Standards Consultant advised the Committee that he had still not received the orders. He believed that the new system would come into effect on 1 May 2008 and that there was a need to publicise everything and sort out how to deal with the sub-committees, etc.

According to the evidence received, there would be standard forms in the forthcoming Guidance and he would try and get hold of a draft copy to avoid duplication of effort.

Members asked if there was anything in the pipeline that they might have to deal with in the first few weeks of May and were advised that there was nothing known of at this stage. The Solicitor & Standards Consultant explained that they would have 20 days to deal with complaints.

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It was agreed that an extra meeting would have to be arranged early in May to discuss the new regulations as the papers should have been received by then. If they had not been received, the meeting would be cancelled.

Members then raised the subject of training in general.

A Member mentioned that he had intended to raise the issue of training for Parish and Town Clerks in connection with agenda item 10, as during the Adjudication Panel proceedings it had been mentioned that advice had been sought from the Watton Town Clerk.

The Standards Officer suggested that she could write to all the Clerks asking them what training they needed.

The Solicitor & Standards Consultant advised that he had intended to arrange more training but was waiting for the new regulations to be up and running. He had spoken to the Watton Town Clerk concerned in Agenda Item 10 offering training and that Watton Town Council was to discuss this at its next meeting.

In general discussion it was felt that there was a wide discrepancy in the standards of Parish and Town Clerks but that it was difficult to address this. Training was available, but there were no powers to force Clerks to attend and some were reluctant to accept change.

There were associations such as the National Association of Parish and Town Councils (NAPTC) and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) which offered advice and training session and had websites for easy access.

The Standards Officer suggested that the Clerks could be invited for a 'get together' to meet each other, exchange ideas and to discuss best practice. Because of the size of the district it might be necessary to hold more than one event, but if they were arranged as social meetings, giving clerks the opportunity to talk through their issues/problems informally, it was hoped that they might be well attended.

It was agreed to include training as an item on the next agenda.

**24/08 STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND: ADJUDICATION PANEL:
APPEALS TRIBUNAL DECISION: COUNCILLOR J.P.
MCCARTHY, WATTON TOWN COUNCIL (ITEM FOR
INFORMATION)(AGENDA ITEM 10)**

The Solicitor & Standards Consultant explained the delay mentioned in the decision. The Appellant's letter to the Adjudication Panel had actually been sent to the wrong address as it had been assumed that the Panel were based in the same place as the Standards Board. As this had occurred over the Christmas period it had compounded the delay.

There was some discussion about how the decision had been publicised. The Standards Officer advised that the Standards Board

should pay to have a public notice put in the press but this had not been seen. However there had been an article in the Eastern Daily Press and in the Watton & Swaffham Times about this case.

It was also mentioned that the decision was available to view on the Adjudication Panel's website, but not on the Standard Board's website.

25/08 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 11)

It was agreed that an extra meeting was required to consider the new Regulations and Guidance for Standards Committees. The Solicitor & Standards Consultant believed that this would be received by the end of April.

An additional meeting was therefore arranged to be held on Tuesday 6 May 2008 at 2.15pm in the Anglia Room, Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham.

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The meeting closed at 2.57 pm

CHAIRMAN