

SOUTH RIBBLE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Standards Committee

Meeting held at 4.30pm on Tuesday 1 May 2012 in the Cross Room, Civic Centre, West Paddock, Leyland, PR25 1DH

Present:-

Independent Member Mr Holt (in the chair)

Independent Member Mr Ellison

Borough Councillors Harrison, Heyworth, Mrs Mort, Otter and Miss Walker

Parish Councillors Mrs Gelder, Mrs Houghton and Mr Mitchell

In Attendance:-

Maureen Wood (Director of Corporate Governance), David Whelan (Legal Services Manager), Kay Lovelady (Principal Solicitor) and Carol Eddleston (Democratic Services Officer)

Public Attendance:-

None

Other Officers:-

None

Minute No.	Description/Resolution
5	Apologies for Absence An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of the Independent Chairman, Mr Russell Atkinson.
6	Declarations of Interest There were no declarations of interest.
7	Minutes of the Last Meeting RESOLVED (unanimously): that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the chairman.
8	Report on the Localism Act 2011 – The New Standards Regime The Principal Solicitor delivered a presentation updating the committee on the latest position in relation to the Localism Act 2011 and the draft recommendations to full Council on 23 May 2012. She confirmed that very little had changed since the committee had met in March, with detailed guidance from central government not yet available. However, so that there was no hiatus in the Council's ability to deal with complaints about members, the Council had started the process to recruit an Independent Person and hoped to make an appointment within the next couple of weeks. The chairman and officers responded to questions and observations from members of the committee.

The chairman agreed with members and officers that it was regrettable that guidance was not yet available but suggested that, in view of the schedule of Council meetings and the anticipated commencement date of 1 July, it seemed fairer to members of the Council to have some guidelines in place before 1 July. Members agreed that the sanctions available in the future were extremely limited in scope. The chairman confirmed that the draft proposals to Council included the creation of a new stand-alone Standards Committee of borough councillors, appointed on a politically proportionate basis, with representatives from parish councils being asked to assist where it was felt to be appropriate.

Officers confirmed that, unless a complaint was dismissed immediately, the subject member would be informed about the complaint as soon as a decision had been taken to do something about the complaint. At this time the subject member could also seek the views of the Independent Person. It was hoped that this would encourage an informal resolution to be found.

Members and officers alike again lamented the loss of the invaluable input of the outgoing independent members and the fact that parish councillors might still be asked to join a new Standards Committee but would not be able to vote. Parish Councillors' experience in dealing with dispensation requests had been particularly valuable.

The Director of Corporate Governance said she regretted being in the position the council was in and, if she had any choice, she would keep the experience and expertise of the current independent and parish council representatives.

Members joined Councillor Harrison in thanking all the independent members and parish council representatives for their contribution to the committee over the years.

The Director of Corporate Governance expressed thanks on behalf of all councillors and officers of the Standards Committee to the parish council representatives and independent members for their dedication, impartiality, professionalism and 'sheer endurance' over the years.

The chairman extended his own thanks to everybody on the committee for their service, especially to the independent members and the parish council representatives and commended the apolitical manner in which decisions had always been taken. He also thanked the officers who had been involved in the committee over the years for their practical and sensible advice. Last but by no means least he thanked Russell Atkinson in his absence for his outstanding chairmanship and sense of humour which had been of great value to the committee.

Finally Parish Council representative Mrs Gelder expressed her thanks to officers for the highly informative and successful training sessions and workshops that they had delivered to members across the county.

RESOLVED: (Yes – 9, No – 0, Abstention – 1)

That the detailed proposals contained in the report be recommended, unchanged, for approval by full Council.

..... Chairman

The meeting closed at 5.15pm.