

Mr Keith Ford was the only candidate nominated and seconded. He was therefore appointed Chairman for 2011/12.

RESOLVED

that Keith Ford be elected as Independent Chairman of the Standards Committee for the Municipal Year 2011/12.

STD/11/27 Appointment of Independent Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2011/12

The Chairman of the Standards Committee invited nominations for the Vice-Chairman (Independent Member) of the Standards Committee for the Municipal Year 2011/12.

Miss Deborah Maggs was the only candidate nominated and seconded. She was therefore appointed Vice-Chairman (Independent Member) for the Municipal Year 2011/12.

RESOLVED

that Deborah Maggs be elected as Vice-Chairman (Independent Member) of the Standards Committee for the Municipal Year 2011/12.

STD/11/28 Appointment of Elected Member Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2011/12

The Chairman of the Standards Committee invited nominations for the Vice-Chairman (Elected Member) of the Standards Committee for the Municipal Year 2011/12.

Cllr Mrs Jane Lawrence was the only candidate nominated and seconded. She was therefore appointed Vice-Chairman (Elected Member) for the Municipal Year 2011/12.

RESOLVED

that Cllr Mrs Jane Lawrence be elected as Vice-Chairman (Elected Member) of the Standards Committee for the Municipal Year 2011/12.

STD/11/29 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on the 21 January 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

STD/11/30 Members' Interests

(a) Personal Interests:-

There were no declarations made.

(b) Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-

There were no declarations made.

STD/11/31 Public Participation

There were no applications from members of the public to speak under the Public Participation Procedure allowed for under Part A4 of the Constitution.

STD/11/32 Election of Members to Central Bedfordshire Council

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that Central Bedfordshire Council had held an election on 5 May 2011, at which time the membership of the Council had reduced from 66 members to 59 members. The membership of the Council comprised of 49 Conservatives, 5 Liberal Democrats, 4 Independents and 1 Labour.

The Committee noted that all of the Declarations of Office had been signed and 54 out of the 59 Councillors had returned their Register of Interest forms. It was expected that the remaining 5 forms would be received by the end of June.

STD/11/33 Update on Current Standard Matters

The Committee considered the report of the Monitoring Officer which advised Members of the latest position relating to Assessments, Reviews and Hearings.

The Monitoring Officer provided the new members of the Standards Committee with an overview of the Assessment process as follows:-

- A complaint is received by the Monitoring Officer
- A Standards Committee (Initial Assessment) is arranged with 3 members of the full Standards Committee to determine if a potential breach has occurred.
- The options available to the Assessment panel are: -
 - no potential breach of the code of conduct,
 - send the complaint to the Monitoring Officer for investigation as a potential breach has been found,
 - other action which normally required the Monitoring Officer's involvement,
 - in certain limited circumstances, the complaint can be referred to Standards for England – this is possible when the potential breach is very serious or the Member is too high ranking for the matter to be dealt with locally.

The Committee considered the new spreadsheet which would provide information on the cases being considered. It was agreed that the new layout was clearer and more accurate than the older version.

The Committee noted that this process was only to be in place until the end of this year at which point the Localism Bill will be in place. The Committee expressed the need for some process to remain. It was noted that work was beginning to consider possible options.

It was suggested that the next meeting contain an item where the Committee could discuss possible options. It was understood that any changes would impact the budget for the department in 2012/13 and would also require changes to the Constitution.

RESOLVED

- 1. that the update on current standards matters report be noted.**
- 2. that an item be included in the next Standards Committee agenda to consider options for the future of the Standards Committee.**

STD/11/34

Notifications of Gifts and Hospitality declared by Central Bedfordshire Members

The Committee received the report of the Monitoring Officer which provided an update on gifts and hospitality declared by Central Bedfordshire Members since the last meeting.

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that a reminder had been sent to all Members through the Members Information Bulletin about the requirement to declare all gifts and hospitality over £25.

It was agreed that Members should err on the side of caution when considering declaring anything. It was the Committee's opinion that it is better to declare something even if the value is found to be less than £25.

The Monitoring Officer also informed the Committee that the Bribery Act was to come into force on 1 July 2011, which requires organisations to review their gifts and hospitality policies to ensure they are in keeping with the Act. In this regard, Members need to consider if they are invited to accept hospitality from a company whether bribery could be a factor.

RESOLVED

that the declarations of gifts and hospitality received by Central Bedfordshire Members as set out in Appendix "A" to the report of the Monitoring Officer be noted.

STD/11/35 The Localism Bill - Verbal Update

The Monitoring Officer provided an update on the progress of the Localism Bill through Parliament. When enacted, the Localism Act will remove the current framework. Local Authorities would still be required to promote high standards of conduct. Local Authorities including Town and Parish Councils would have discretion to adopt a code of conduct and could arrange their own procedures for dealing with complaints but would be under no obligation to do so.

Currently the Council supervises standards in the Town and Parish Councils but that would cease under the Bill. It was noted that the Chairman of the Standards Committee had written to the Head of Standards for England regarding the proposed changes.

Members of Local Authorities would still be required to complete a register of interest form and failure to do so would be a criminal offence.

The Committee noted that the Bill is likely to receive the Royal assent in November 2011. The current framework would continue for 2 – 3 months to allow transitional arrangements.

The Committee has agreed to email the Chairman with suggestions for ways the Standards Committee could be reconfigured to continue after the Bill comes into force. These ideas will be brought to the next meeting for consideration.

The Monitoring Officer agreed that following the Chief Legal Officers Summit to be held on 5 July, he would email the Committee with any updates relating to the Localism Bill.

RESOLVED

- 1. that the current progress of the Localism Bill be noted.**
- 2. that the Committee forward the Chairman suggestions of ways the Standards Committee could be reconfigured to continue to promote high standards of ethical conduct in the future.**

STD/11/36 Training

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that arrangements were being made to hold Code of Conduct training for all Members of the Council. There would also be training for new members of the Committee which could be run in house using the expertise held in the legal department.

STD/11/37 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Standards Committee is scheduled for 19 August 2011. Apologies have been received from Mr K Ford, Cllr Mrs J Lawrence and John Atkinson all of whom will not be available on the day.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 9.30 a.m. and concluded at 10.40 a.m.)

Chairman

Dated