

EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE STANDARDS BOARD

Date: 1 February 2012

Venue: East Northamptonshire House, Cedar Drive, Thrapston

Time: 7.30 pm

Present: Graham Blagden (Chairman)

East Northamptonshire Councillors: Glenvil Greenwood-Smith
Barbara Jenney
Brian Northall

Town and Parish Councillors: Don Campbell
Prudence Goss
Arthur Whittaker

Independent Members: Hilary Daniels
Graham Matthews

365. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2011 were approved and signed by the chairman.

366. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies.

367. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

368. ACTIVITY REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

A report was received on ethical matters dealt with by the Monitoring Officer since the last meeting. It was noted that 5 enquiries had been recorded from parish and town council clerks and councillors, district councillors and the general public, mainly seeking advice on personal and prejudicial interests.

Members were informed that the government's intended start date for the new standards arrangements would be 1 July 2012. It was noted that Standards for England had effectively ceased activities on 31 January 2012. The Monitoring Officer stated that there was currently no transition in place between old and new systems, so any new complaints would need to be resolved by 1 July, under the old code. It was hoped that no complaint would arrive of a seriousness to require referral to Standards for England in the interim period.

Regarding the existing complaint against an East Northamptonshire councillor, it was noted that this action had now concluded. A further complaint that had been received against a Parish Councillor had been considered at an Assessment Sub-Committee immediately prior to the meeting and the response generated would be conveyed to the councillor concerned in the near future.

It was noted that the Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards Board, together with the Monitoring Officer, met the Leader of the Council, and the Leaders of the Independent and Labour groups to discuss the future of the Standards Committee. All expressed support for the Standards Board Working Party to continue its work on developing future standards arrangements for this council. This approach was then formally endorsed by the Council at its meeting on 9 January.

A workshop to discuss possible future Standards arrangements would be held on 27 February 2012 for all Town and Parish Councillors. The workshop would explore Localism Act requirements, proposals for East Northamptonshire Council in terms of its arrangements and give consideration as to how these proposals might be of assistance to Town and Parish Councils in the District.

369. PROPOSALS FOR EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL'S ARRANGEMENTS FOR STANDARDS

The board received and considered a report from the Monitoring Officer which presented the findings of the Standards Board Working Party relating to the key issues faced by the council concerning the Standards aspects of the Localism Act 2011.

The Monitoring Officer provided an outline of the current proposals and advised the committee that its comments would be forwarded to the Scrutiny Committee on 6 February followed by Policy and Resources Committee on 13 February. Once all three committees' views had been collated, details would be fed back to the Town and Parish Workshop on 27 February.

Members were asked for their comments on various issues in the report relating to the advancement of ENC's standards arrangements. Responses included:

- The new Standards Committee should comprise a combination of town and parish and district councillors and the mix of members should be as diverse as possible.
- Various amendments were made to the wording and content of the draft Code of Conduct. It was also agreed by the board that signing the council's constitution would also be an acceptance of the code of conduct.
- The board agreed that the council's constitution be amended to reflect the need of a councillor with a relevant "Disclosable Pecuniary interest" to withdraw from a meeting room should the situation arise.
- Regarding independent members, the board was happy to recruit two persons; one active and one as reserve. There should also be a requirement for independent persons to either reside, or work at a place of business within the district boundaries.
- The board was happy for the Monitoring Officer to have delegated power to deal with initial complaints.

- The granting of dispensations should also be left to the Monitoring Officer who would work up a draft set of arrangements to be presented to the board at a later date.

It was agreed that a revised and amended version of the draft Code of Conduct would be supplied to Scrutiny Committee for its views.

Chairman