

Standards Committee Minutes

Date: 8 January 2013

Time: 6.15 - 6.35 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs L M Clarke (in the Chair)

Revd G Hargrove*, Councillor Mrs G A Jones, Councillor Ms R Knight, Councillor D A C Shakespeare OBE, Parish Cllr J Sherlock*, Parish Cllr Mrs V Smith* and Councillor Ms J D Wassell,

Apologies for absence were received from Parish Cllr D Banfield*, Councillor D J Carroll, Councillor J L Richards OBE, Councillor J A Savage and Mrs E Springford*

* **Observers**

8 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 12 November 2012 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

10 DISPENSATIONS RE COUNCIL TAX SETTING

The Committee considered a report setting out the situation regards the precautionary proposal grant a dispensation in order that the Council would be able to set Council Tax at its next scheduled Full Council meeting and up to May 2015.

Under the Localism Act 2011 the power to grant dispensations may be -granted by the Council to either the appropriate authority's Standards Committee, a sub-committee of that Committee or to the Monitoring Officer. Wycombe District Council on 31 July 2012 had resolved to delegate this power to the Standards Committee, after consultation with the Independent Person.

The Disclosable Pecuniary Interests Regulations issued by the Government in June 2012 did not contain an express exemption for setting of Council tax or parish precepts under the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

Without the dispensation Members could technically be committing a criminal offence by speaking and voting on a matter in which they had a disclosable pecuniary interest as a result of any beneficial interest they may have in land within

the District. If so it would be the case that so many members of the Council would have such disclosable pecuniary interests that it would impede the transaction of business and the Council would be unable to set its Council tax for each year. Fellow Monitoring Officers across Buckinghamshire were arranging to grant dispensations to their Members to discuss and vote on Council Tax.

The Standards Committee appreciated the argument put forward in the report and felt the delegation of the authority to grant such dispensation to the Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the Independent Person) for the remainder of the Council Term i.e. until May 2015 to be wholly appropriate. It was suggested and agreed that reference to all budget discussions at all Council Meetings, and the word 'precepts' be inserted (alongside 'council tax') in the resolution.

The Meeting:

RESOLVED: That delegated authority be given to the Monitoring Officer under section 33 of the Localism Act 2011, in consultation with one of the Independent Persons appointed by the Council, to grant dispensations to District and Parish Council members to take part and vote in budget discussions and the setting of Council Tax and precepts, such dispensations to apply for the remainder of the Council term, i.e. until May 2015.

11 COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMMENTS QUARTER 2

The Committee's attention was drawn to the quarterly statistics relating to complaints made about the Council's services for the period 1 July – 30 September 2012 (Quarter 2). The year on year comparison of complaints and compliments was also considered.

The 97% of complaints answered within target was noted along with the two major improvements made in the housing and refuse services in response to previous complaints.

Work being done on the implementation of a democratic filter in respect of housing ombudsmen complaints was commended as were the plans to make the phone system more user friendly.

RESOLVED: That the data and charts for the period 1 July to 30 September 2012 (Quarter 2) as set out in Appendices to the report be noted.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

Peter Druce - Democratic Services
Catherine Herries- - Principal Solicitor
Smith