

STANDARDS COMMITTEE22 October 2003
(6.00pm – 6.35pm)**PRESENT:** Councillors Stebbings (Chair), Dryden, Howell, Hughes, Pinnington and Taylor.
External Member Ms Hobbs**FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**03/s/26 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting on 25 June 2003 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

03/s/27 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Dr Clark (External Member).

03/s/28 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

03/s/29 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from the public.

03/s/30 **CODE OF CONDUCT: STANDARDS COMMITTEE PROCEDURE FOR LOCAL DETERMINATION OF ALLEGED BREACHES**

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that the Standards Board could now refer complaints for determination by local Standards Committees. For the time being, it could only refer cases which had been investigated by its own "ethical standards officers" for decision. The longer term plan was to refer some cases locally for investigation, as well as decision.

So far as was known, there had been no complaints to the Standards Board about Cambridge City Councillors so far. However, it was important that to have an agreed procedure in place, to enable a prompt response to the arrival of a referred allegation. On receipt of a referral from the Standards Board, the Council was under an obligation to determine it within three months.

A suggested procedure was appended to the report, the first part of which dealt with procedure up to the hearing, and was based on a procedure adopted by the London Borough of Hackney. The second part, dealing with the hearing itself, followed very closely the model procedure recommended by the Standards Board.

Members considered the procedure and suggested minor clarifications to the text.

Resolved - that the Procedure for local determination of allegations about the conduct of Council members be adopted, subject to the agreed amendments.

03/s/31 PLANNING CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE

Officers have been working to develop a local code of good practice for dealing with planning applications. A model code, prepared by the Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors, was circulated with the agenda. This had been endorsed by the Standards Board, the Local Government Ombudsman and the Audit Commission.

The model code had been considered informally by the Planning Committee, which had been supportive of its introduction, although it had disliked the admonitory style of the model code. Some changes were also needed to reflect local practice. Consequently the Planning Committee had asked the officers to redraft the model code and officers hoped to submit this formally to the Planning Committee and to this committee shortly. The amended code would be substantially similar in content to the model code.

Members considered the Code and discussed the comments made by the Planning Committee and the implications of its introduction, including those for Area Committees.

Agreed to consider the Code following its revision and submission to Planning Committee.

03/s/32 DISCUSSION PAPER – PROMOTING THE WORK OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Director of Central Services had discussed with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee how to make its role more proactive, both towards other members of the Council and towards the public. It had been suggested that the Committee publish a quarterly Bulletin for councillors. This would be brief and to the point, but could, for example, cover frequently asked questions in Cambridge about the Code and feedback on significant national issues (especially cases considered by the Standards Board). The main aim would be to keep the profile of ethical issues generally and the Code in particular high in members' minds.

There was a perceived need for the Council to improve the public's awareness of their rights to pursue ethical issues. In relation to complaints about member conduct, reference to the Standards Board was made in the leaflet available to the public about How to Complain. The Council had recently appointed a Corporate Marketing Officer and one aspect of her remit could include this area.

The Committee had considered a Work Programme in October 2002 and an updated programme had been circulated with the agenda taking into account the discussion referred to above.

Members discussed the suggestions for promoting its role in the Council and the City and endorsed the suggested actions set out in the programme.

The meeting ended at 6.35pm.

Chair