

Runnymede Borough Council

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

17 September 2002 at 7.30 p.m.

Members of the  
Committee present: Councillors Ms C.M. Simmons (Chairman), A.P. Tollett (Vice Chairman),  
E.G. Barrett, A.J. Davis, Mrs E.E. Price; and Dr. R.F. Miller (independent  
Member)

Members of the  
Committee absent: Mrs C. Spurling (independent Member)

284. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 19 February 2002 and 16 May 2002 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

285. COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE AND PROCEDURES

The Committee noted its Terms of Reference and its operating procedures. Members were advised that the Committee's role and functions derived partly from the Local Government Act 2000 and regulations under it, and partly from the Council itself which had conferred some complementary functions upon it. The procedures for 'Hearing of Complaints' would possibly need to be amended following the imminent publication of a new Statutory Instrument under Section 66 of the Act.

286. RUNNYMEDE CODE OF CONDUCT - OPERATION OF

The Runnymede Code of Conduct for Members of Runnymede Borough Council had been adopted in May 2002. This Code followed exactly the wording recommended by the Standards Board for England. However, it was proposed to revisit the Code at the next scheduled meeting on 18 February 2003 in order to ensure that any proposed changes could be endorsed at the Council's Annual Meeting in May of that year. In the meantime, it was agreed that the Borough Secretary and Leisure Services Officer would ensure that all members of the Committee received copies of any published material concerning code of conduct investigations at other local authorities.

287. CODE OF CONDUCT - TRAINING FOR MEMBERS AND CO-OPTED MEMBERS

The Chairman commented that the two training sessions held in June for members and co-opted Members had been extremely valuable. Twenty-eight of the forty-nine Members eligible had attended, and a further session would be held before Christmas. Thereafter, a training session would be held every year.

288. FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS FOR APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

The Committee noted that with effect from 28 August 2003, the Council could not appoint anyone as an independent Member of the Standards Committee, unless the appointment was -

- a) approved by a majority of the Members of the authority;
- b) advertised in one or more newspapers circulating in the area of the authority;
- c) of a person who has submitted an application to the authority;
- d) of a person who has not within the period of five years immediately preceding the date of the appointment been a Member or Officer of the authority; and
- e) of a person who is not a relative or close friend of a Member or Officer of the authority.

The two existing independent Members would be eligible to seek re-appointment if they so wished. It was agreed that the selection process would be initiated early in 2003 so that the two persons selected could have their appointments confirmed at the Annual Meeting in May.

289. STANDARDS BOARD CONFERENCE - 20 MAY 2002

The Vice-Chairman and the Borough Secretary and Leisure Services Officer, as Monitoring Officer, had attended a conference organised by the Standards Board in Birmingham on 20 May 2002. The conference had noted the concerns of Parish Councils which, unlike District Councils, had never been subject to a code of conduct imposed centrally. Of more interest to District Councils was the concern at the amount of time taken between a complaint being lodged with the Standards Board and the commencement of the investigation.

Both delegates felt that the Conference had been useful and it was understood that it would be an annual event.

290. OMBUDSMAN INVESTIGATIONS

Consideration of Ombudsman investigations was one of the functions assigned to the Committee by the Council as a non-statutory function. Members were advised how the Ombudsman (Commissioner for Local Administration) operated, and of his relationship with the Standards Board.

A number of complaints against this Council had been made to the Ombudsman in 1999/2000 and 2000/2001 but maladministration had not been found in any instance. Since 1 April 2002 three complaints had been lodged, but on each occasion the Ombudsman had decided not to hold an investigation. Members were advised that the Ombudsman would not normally entertain a complaint until the Council had carried out its own investigation, nor would he investigate a case where the complainant was aggrieved at a Council decision which had been fairly and properly arrived at.

It was noted that if the Ombudsman ever did find the Council guilty of maladministration, a report would be submitted to this Committee.

291. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

The Committee was advised that future agendas would carry a standing item dealing with 'Complaints Received'. To date, no complaints had been received against Members of the Council during this Municipal Year.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.29 p.m.)