

**ETHICS AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC CENTRE, STOURPORT ON SEVERN
TUESDAY, 29th March 2005**

PRESENT:

Independent Members: Reverend M Warren (Chairman), Mrs A McDowell (Vice-Chairman) and Mr C J Brighton

Councillors: Mrs I M Dolan, P Dyke, Mrs S M Hayward, Miss S C Meekings, C D Nicholls, and J C Simmonds.

Parish Representative: Councillor R Hobson

CM.883 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor T Whatmore, Parish Representative.

CM.884 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

No substitute members were appointed.

CM.885 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were made.

CM.886 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 1st February 2005 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

CM.887 CONSULTATION PAPER : A CODE FOR THE FUTURE

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced a briefing paper that outlined the contents of a Consultation Paper from the Standards Board for England on the Members' Code of Conduct.

The Code of Conduct had been introduced three years ago. The Standards Board had been having teething problems with the Code of Conduct and felt it was an opportune time to ask authorities whether there were any areas of the Code that they felt there were any areas of the Code that would benefit from change.

The Consultation Paper contained 29 questions but members were not limited to these. They were able to reply as a Committee or individually if they preferred.

A copy of the responses made by Members is appended to these minutes.

CM.888 FEEDBACK ON STANDARDS BOARD FORUM

Mr Brighton gave feedback on a meeting of the West Mercia Independent Members' Forum that he had attended on Thursday 10th March 2005 at South Shropshire District Offices, Ludlow.

The meeting had been attended by Independent Members from West Mercia County and District authorities plus members of the West Mercia Police and the Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority. The objective of the meeting had been the proposed formation of an Independent Members Forum for West Mercia. The Standards Board for England was fully supportive of the establishment of such Forums as a means of support and networking.

The Forum emphasised the importance of the role of Independent Members. The nature of their role was that they could consider matters from a difference perspective to that of elected members. The Standards Board, in their guidance for Standards Committees, highlighted the value of independent members in helping to increase public confidence and showing that the committee was fair.

It was interesting to note that many authorities had a majority of Independent Members on their Standards Committee to avoid accusations of self-policing and political overtones. The Standards Board for England considered this to be desirable.

Anne Redhill, Senior Policy Advisor to the Standards Board for England had addressed the Forum. She had discussed the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of Councils and covered protocols, constitutions, ethical audits and ethics and standards.

Mr Brighton had found the Forum meeting to be a good opportunity to meet with other Independent Members. The Forum had agreed to meet twice a year (during the summer in the evening and in the winter in the afternoon).

It was agreed that the minutes from the Forum's meeting held on the 10th March 2005 would be appended to these minutes for Members' information.

The Chairman thanked Mr Brighton for his feedback, which the Committee found most interesting.

CM.889 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

DECISION : Under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of 'exempt information' as defined in paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

CM.890 SUMMARY OF MINUTES

The following proceedings were considered after the press and public had been excluded from the meeting. A summary of the minutes relating to these items have been made as "exempt information" would be disclosed if the minutes were published in full.

Exempt Minutes

The Exempt minutes of the meeting held on the 1st February 2005 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

CM.891 Chairman Leaving

The Chairman informed committee members that he would be leaving the area at the end of May 2005 as he was moving to a new job in Avonmouth. He was warmly thanked for his Chairmanship of the committee and Members wished him success in his new job. Members agreed that it should be recommended to Council that Mrs Anne McDowell should become Chairman once Reverend Warren had left.

The meeting concluded at 6.47 pm.,