

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Agenda Item 3

STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 4 JULY 2011

Held at Capron House, Midhurst at 10.30am

Present:

Nick Bennett
Anne Dickens #
Tom Tupper

David Burden
Dame Denise Holt # (Chair)

Janet Coles

Independent member of the Committee

SDNPA Officers: Kevin Gardner (Monitoring Officer) and Fiona MacLeod (Member Services Manager)

APOLOGIES

1. Apologies were received from Jim Funnell, Margaret Paren (ex officio) and Charles Peck (ex officio).

COMMITTEE CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR

2. Denise Holt was confirmed as Chair of the Committee and presided over the remainder of the meeting. Janet Coles was welcomed to her first meeting of the Committee.
3. Anne Dickens was confirmed as Deputy Chair of the Committee.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

4. There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES

5. The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on the 11 February 2011 were approved and signed as a correct record by the Chair.
6. Members were advised that the Protocols, Officer Code of Conduct and Complaints & Feedback Policy referred to in minutes 23, 27, 30 and 33 had been adopted by the Authority in March 2011.

URGENT MATTERS

7. There were no urgent matters raised.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

8. There were no members of the public present.

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Standards Committee

LOCALISM BILL UPDATE

9. Report SC 06/11 providing Members with an update on the Government's proposed changes to the standards regime was introduced by the Monitoring Officer, who referred to previous reports brought to the Committee.
10. The Monitoring Officer reminded Members that the current regime in dealing with complaints from members of the public was low cost and low risk for the complainant. Abolition of this regime without replacing it with anything else would mean that members of the public would be reliant on the existing law to have issues aired and determined. Commencing civil proceedings against a Member was unlikely to be a viable option for many members of the public due to the costs involved.

Anne Dickens joined the meeting at 10.52am

11. Members expressed the following views regarding a successor regime to uphold standards:
 - the Nolan principles would still be in place, therefore comfortable with the loss of the Standards Board
 - the clarification of the position on pre-determination was helpful
 - there would be a need to manage potential public perception of a loss of access to a speedy and low cost complaints process
 - consideration needed to be given to how issues of conduct that were not easily addressed under the current criminal law, such as bullying and working relationships with officers would be dealt with . One option was to handle this through further development of the Member and Officer Relations Protocol
 - emphasis should be on maintenance of high standards of conduct and prevention of complaints by pro-active use of protocols
 - a positive framework and coherent suite of policies was needed to maintain appropriate behaviours
 - some commonality of approach was needed with other local government authorities, in particular for dual/triple hatted Members, regarding declarations of interest protocols
 - legal advice should be sought to take forward any system to sanction or censure
12. The Monitoring Officer thanked Members for their input and advised that options to include resources and risk management would be reported at a future Committee meeting.
13. **Resolved:** that the Committee notes the current position with regard to the proposed changes to the standards regime

REGISTRATION OF INTERESTS – WEB PUBLICATION

14. Report SC 07/11 proposing the Committee considered an Internal Audit recommendation regarding web publication of the Authority's Register of Members' Interests was introduced by the Monitoring Officer.
15. The arguments for an against web publication of the Register were considered. While publication would promote greater transparency, it was also felt that publication to the world at large of certain personal details and other sensitive

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information was disproportionate to that aim. It was recognised that web publication would only be possible with the consent of the relevant Member. The experience of the other two national park authorities that had done this was that it had not led to any increase in complaints against Members. The Chair summed up the debate recognising that, with the standards regime due for an overhaul in the coming months via the Localism Bill, a decision on web publication should await the outcome of this, and be considered along with other aspects of the Authority's response to the requirements of the legislation.

16. Resolved: that the Committee:

1. considered the issues raised in the report
2. advises the Internal Auditor that a final decision on web publication will be made when the changes in legal requirements in this respect, through the Localism Bill, are known

STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2011-12

17. Report SC 08/11 inviting comments from the Committee on the work plan and training opportunities was introduced by the Monitoring Officer.
18. A training session on Governance had been held on 21 June 2011 for new and existing Members of the Authority.
19. **Resolved:** that the Committee agrees the work plan at Appendix 1 to the report

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 11.48 am