

AT A MEETING of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE of HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL held at The Castle, Winchester on 8 February 2011.

PRESENT:

Independent Chairman:

p Mr. G. Ellis

Councillors:

a B. Dash

p A. Gibson

p G. Hockley

a A. Rice

a J. West

p S. Woodward

Independent Members:

p Mrs B. North

22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr M. C. James (Independent Chairman) and Councillors A. Rice, B. Dash and J. West.

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

24. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Committee held on 22 June 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

25. CHANGES TO THE STANDARDS REGIME IN ENGLAND

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive (Item 5 in the Minute Book).

The report was outlined to Members and it was explained that the Localism Bill provided the first indication of the possible future for Standards Boards, but the final outcome would not be known until legislation was passed. In particular it was highlighted that the future may include the removal of a prescribed system and local determination of how to maintain a high standard of conduct. Furthermore that the Bill proposes the abolition of the current Code of Conduct, although this could be re-adopted in some form as part of local determination. The transition process set out in the Bill was described to the Committee and the impact on ongoing Standards Board work discussed. The possible timescale for change was questioned and it was confirmed that indications implied legislation could be enacted in September 2011. It

was noted that the Committee would continue to exist and to function until legislation was passed and any transition period was complete.

The Committee discussed in detail the potential impact of such changes, considering in particular whether a Standards Committee was necessary and whether recourse to the Police and the Ombudsman could sufficiently replace it. Members also considered whether a Code of Conduct could be implemented without a Standards Committee.

Members felt that it was important for the public to feel they had an opportunity to express their views. Therefore should the Localism Bill become law, careful consideration should be given to the questions of whether Hampshire County Council wants to retain a Code of Conduct and if so, whether it wants a body to administer it. It was noted that the process to determine this was via a Cabinet and subsequent County Council decision. Members wanted to consider the options in more detail and make a recommendation to feed into the decision process on the basis of their experience of the existing system. It was agreed that the impact on the public and information regarding the level of complaints received by the Standards Committee were central to any decision and should be included to provide context to any report setting out the options for the Council to take. Therefore it was

RESOLVED that:

- i. an additional future meeting of the Standards Committee be arranged at a suitable time prior to a County Council discussion on a locally determined Standards regime;
- ii. a report is prepared for that meeting setting out detailed options and contextual information regarding levels of complaints and public impact to inform a discussion and enable a recommendation to be made to Cabinet.