

Minutes of:	STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	14 February 2008
Present:	Councillors K Audin, R C A Brown, M Connolly, V D D'Albert, D M Higgin, T Holt and J F Walton.
Independent Members:	A Loyns, K Wainwright (in the Chair) and A Withington
Public Attendance:	There were no members of the public in attendance at the meeting.
Apologies for Absence:	Mrs A Brown

S.673 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

S.674 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present to ask questions under this item.

S.675 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2007 were approved and signed as a correct record.

S.676 DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT – “CONSULTATION ON ORDERS AND REGULATIONS RELATING TO THE CONDUCT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY MEMBERS IN ENGLAND”

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report which contained suggested responses to the Consultation Paper issued by the Government in response to the Local Government Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The Consultation Paper focused upon the proposal to have all complaints against Members initially considered by local Standards Committees instead of complaints being referred to the National Standard Board of England.

The Consultation Paper had posed 16 questions and the report provided a suggested response to each of those questions. Members were invited to consider the questions and suggested responses and indicate whether or not they would wish to add or amend any of the responses provided.

The Members addressed each question in turn and issues were raised as follows:-

Question 1

It was considered important that Members of the Committee should be involved in one part of the process only, and be involved in one sub-group only, in order to ensure that any Member who was the subject of a complaint was receiving a fair hearing.

Question 2

Members acknowledged the need to ensure that where an allegation was made to more than one Standards Committee, such as the case of a Member being a representative of both his or her local authority and a joint authority, then it was important that there was consistency in terms of handling the complaint. It was felt that it would not be appropriate for two bodies to deal with the same offence.

Question 3 – Response agreed.

Question 4 – In principle, Members felt that a Member against who a complaint had been made had the right to know at the point it was received by the Monitoring Officer.

Question 5 – Response agreed.

Question 6 – Members indicated that they would support the maximum sanction available to Standards Committees being increased from suspension of three months to suspension of six months.

Question 7 – Response agreed.

Question 8 – Response agreed.

Question 9 – Response agreed.

Question 10 – Response agreed.

Question 11 – Response agreed.

Question 12 – Response agreed.

Question 13 – Members felt uneasy with proposals to allow an Ethical Standards Officer to be able to withdraw references to the Adjudication Panel except in exceptional circumstances.

Question 14 – Response agreed.

Question 15 – Response agreed.

Question 16 – Response agreed.

Delegated Decision

1. That the response as set out in the report, with the comments made at this meeting, be forwarded to the relevant Government Department in response to the Consultation Paper.
2. That in forwarding the response, the Monitoring Officer inform the Government of the Committee's concern at the short period of consultation.

S.677 FORMATION OF AGMA JOINT COMMITTEE FOR FILTERING

The Monitoring Officer asked Members to consider a suggestion that it may be useful to form an AGMA Joint Committee for filtering complaints.

Members considered that it was preferable to deal with such issues in-house unless joint arrangements because absolutely necessary.

Delegated Decision

That no action be taken on the suggestion of an AGMA joint committee for filtering.

S.678 ENHANCED CRIMINAL RECORDS BUREAU CHECK FOR MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

A report of the Monitoring Officer was submitted which asked Members to consider the proposal to undertake enhanced CRB checks on a three-yearly basis and which outlined the process for doing so.

It was reported that the proposal would bring Elected Members into line with staff within the Social Care Sector. There would be a requirement that newly Elected Members would undergo the CRB check within four weeks of their election.

Recommendation to Council

That the proposals contained in the report and the process outlined for undertaking enhanced CRB checks on a three-yearly basis be approved.

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(Note: Councillor Brown asked that his vote against this decision be recorded and Councillor D'Albert asked that his abstention against this decision be recorded).

S.679 ETHICAL GOVERNANCE SURVEY

The Monitoring Officer reported upon responses to date. A report was to be considered by the Audit Committee on 26 February 2008, which would contain an analysis of the responses by both Members and Officers. The overall results were as follows:-

	Positive	Negative	Don't Know
Members	80%	7%	13%
Officers	58%	3%	39%

Delegated Decision

That the report be noted.

K WAINWRIGHT
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.35 pm)