

**EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee of the Exmoor National Park Authority held on Tuesday 23 July 2002 at 12.40 pm in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

PRESENT

Mr M E Taylor (Chairman)
Ms S V Mew (Vice-Chairman)
Mr F J Bray (substitute for Mrs M Russell)
Mr D E Gladding

1. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

Mr Taylor was re-appointed Chairman of the Committee for the Authority year.

2. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

Mrs Mew was re-appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the Authority year.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None were declared.

4. **MEMBERSHIP**

The Committee noted that the Authority had appointed Mr Bray as substitute for Mrs Russell.

5. **MINUTES**

(1) **Confirmation**

The Minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 5 February 2002 were signed as correct.

(2) There were no matters arising.

6. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

7. **TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR MEMBERS**

The Committee considered training notes prepared by the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer which would form the basis of a training programme for members on standards of conduct.

RESOLVED: (1) to agree the training notes, subject to the following: -

23 July 2002

- The inclusion of more detail on the role of the Ethical Standards Officer on pages 3 & 4.
- On page 5 include examples of members' private lives which could impinge upon their official role with the Authority (an example cited at the meeting was members accepting meals which, whether or not they were in excess of the £25 level when gifts needed to be declared, could be construed as compromising impartiality).
- The duty to report the activities of fellow members (page 6) – this aspect to be brought out in the training sessions.
- The training notes to stipulate that members should not make individual visits to planning application sites and, should they have contact with applicants, they should give no indication whatsoever on how they may vote. They should refer applicants to the relevant case officers.
- The training notes to inform members that, if they require advice from the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer on interest declarations, it should be sought prior to meetings being held.
- The assumption at the training sessions to be that members have read the training notes. Therefore, the format for the sessions will be a brief introduction followed by exercises (those set out on pages 7 & 8 and any others that can be identified) and also involving role play situations on cases – the focus to be on where personal and prejudicial interests need to be declared, particularly on planning applications, and the declaration of gifts. A training video supplied by the Standards Board will also be shown.

(2) that two identical training sessions be arranged for Authority members on 11 October and 15 November 2002 (timings to be dependant on whether site visits are held), with members being advised that they are expected to attend one of these sessions, and the Authority subsequently being recommended to suspend any members from the Planning Committee if they fail to attend, unless there are very exceptional circumstances;

(3) that the Member Services Officer obtain copies of the pocket sized booklet, 'The Code to Protect You', for circulation to all Authority members; and

(4) that Bulletins from the Standards Board giving general guidance on aspects of the Code of Conduct/Register of Interests be circulated to Committee members.

8. **STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND CONFERENCE**

The Committee's Chairman and Vice-Chairman, and the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, had attended the first Annual Assembly of Standards Committees in Birmingham on 20 May 2002.

It had been a useful event in identifying the issues surrounding standards of conduct (with workshops in the afternoon) and was proposed to be held annually. It was, however, felt that the Standards Board officers were still exploring the legislation and that perhaps it was too large an event to be more than a briefing session.

The Solicitor and Monitoring Officer said that in future all allegations of misconduct against members would go to the Standards Board and it would be difficult to arrange a local settlement as had been the case under the 1990 Code. Investigations were likely to be lengthy and could result in parties needing to be legally represented. Regulations on the investigatory process were expected later in the year.

9. **THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES (STANDARDS COMMITTEE) (DISPENSATIONS) REGULATIONS 2002**

The Committee noted these Regulations which came into effect on 18 March 2002.

10. **CODE OF CONDUCT**

The Committee noted the content of letters from the Standards Board (8 February 2002) and DEFRA (8 March 2002) on the interpretation of the registers of interest.

11. **COMPOSITION OF THE AUTHORITY'S STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

RESOLVED: to **recommend** the Authority to amend the composition of the Committee by increasing its numbers from 4 to 5, with the fifth member being a second independent member (which would follow recent Standards Board advice and avoid problems when the current sole independent member is unable to attend meetings), and to authorise the necessary advertising of the post to take place.

12. **NEXT MEETING**

The Committee's next meeting would take place on Wednesday 27 November 2002 at 2.30 pm.

(The meeting closed at 1.45 pm)

Chairman