

Ethical Standards Bulletin

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

Ethical Standards Bulletin – Winter 2008/09

Welcome to the latest edition of the Ethical Standards Bulletin. This Bulletin is distributed to elected members from Telford & Wrekin Council, Parish and Town Councils in the Borough of Telford & Wrekin and members of the Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority.

Welcome to the new Monitoring Officer

As many members will be aware, Telford & Wrekin Council has a new Monitoring Officer. Jonathan Eatough joined the Council in January 2009 as Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer. Jonathan previously worked at Kettering Borough Council for nearly 7 years as Head of Democratic & Legal Services.

Jonathan said: “I am delighted to have the opportunity to come and work with such a high performing team at a Council with such a good national reputation. I look forward to working with new colleagues and members to help deliver the Council’s priorities. The key areas that I hope to focus on are ensuring that members remain up to date with the standards regime and that they remain fully briefed on all elements of the ethical governance framework, including for example the Code of Conduct, the Protocol on Member/ Officer Relations and the rules on gifts and hospitality.”

Code of Conduct Training

Code of Conduct training was held on Wednesday 12 November. Thank you to all who attended. A review of training provision is to be undertaken and a report about Standards Training was considered by the Standards Committee when it met on 11th February and members will be notified of further training events when it has been arranged. A certificate of attendance is available if required; please contact Emma Price 01952 380110 (emma.price@telford.gov.uk).

Consultation on Changes to the Code of Conduct

You may recall in the last Bulletin there was an article on the consultation that was being undertaken in respect of a new Code of Conduct. The consultation period has now ended. A date for implementation of the new Code has not been made available yet but members will be made aware of any changes in future Bulletins.

Recent case involving abuse

Allegation:

The member failed to treat others with respect and bullied another person.

Standards Board outcome:

The complainant alleged that Councillor Elizabeth Oades failed to treat a senior council officer with respect at a meeting on 3 March 2008, by directing comments at him, which he considered humiliating and intimidating. Councillor Oades shouted that she thought the use of the closure motion at the meeting was being abused and that it was 'shame on' the office in question. It was further alleged that on 5 March 2008 Councillor Oades sent the same officer an email containing further disparaging comments about his and other, unnamed, officers' lack of impartiality. Councillor Oades blind copied the email to all other members of the opposition on the council, so that the fact that the email had been copied was initially concealed from the officer.

Councillor Oades stated that her comment at the meeting was not premeditated and she considered her comment to be consistent with the general tone of the rest of the meeting, although she accepted that it was inappropriate, and had no intention of intimidating or humiliating the officer. Councillor Oades expressed regret for the words she used and apologised. Councillor Oades considered that officers present at the meeting had not protected opposition members who were verbally attacked by ruling group members.

The ethical standards officer noted that Councillor Oades had considered the extremely acrimonious council meeting to be biased against the opposition. However, the ethical standards officer considered the public statement about the senior officer at the meeting on 3 March, and the tone and content of her email sent on 5 March, to amount to a breach of the Code's requirement for members to treat others with respect. However, on balance, the ethical standards officer took the view that Councillor Oades' conduct fell short of bullying on this occasion.

After the ethical standards officer issued her draft report on the case, Councillor Oades met the senior officer to discuss and overcome their difficulties and then apologised verbally and in writing. She also emailed the members of the council to whom she had blind copied her original message, saying that she regretted any distress or anxiety caused to the officer and had never intended to humiliate or intimidate him or harm his present or future standing with the council.

The ethical standards officer concluded that no further action was necessary.

Register of Interests

Members are being asked to review their Register of Interests form to ensure it is up to date and reflects the current requirements with regard to registration. Letters regarding this issue have been sent out and Members will be contacted by their Clerk or the Monitoring Officer if necessary. Members are asked to return the forms as soon as possible.

Next Edition of the Bulletin

A new Bulletin will be circulated in Spring 2009 when we will aim to concentrate on planning probity issues. The aim of the Bulletin is to keep all elected members up to date with current issues and changes in respect of Ethical Standards matters. If there are any issues which you would like to see addressed in the Bulletin then please let us know. Contact details are set out below.

CONTACTS DETAILS

- **For Parish and Town Councillors** you should in the first instance contact your local parish/town clerk.
- **For members of the Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority** please contact Mrs Sharon Lloyd, Corporate Services Manager, at Brigade Headquarters
Telephone number 01743 260210
e-mail address sharon.lloyd@shropshirefire.gov.uk
- **For all queries from Telford & Wrekin Councillors** the points of contact are set out below:-

| Name | Job Title | Telephone Number | e-mail address |
|----------------------------|---|-------------------------|--|
| Jonathan Eatough | Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer | 01952 383200 | jonathan.eatough@telford.gov.uk |
| Matthew Cumberbatch | Group Solicitor (Standards and Regulatory) | 01952 383255 | matthew.cumberbatch@telford.gov.uk |
| Ian Ross | Group Solicitor (Litigation and Environment) | 01952 383255 | ian.ross@telford.gov.uk |
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