

Title of Report : CODE OF CONDUCT, TRAINING AND REGISTER OF INTERESTS

Report of : Head of Legal and Democratic Services

To : Standards Committee

Date : 7th December 2007

Item No : 5

Purpose of report : Further to update the Committee (following the update given to the September 2007 meeting) on training of members on the new Members Code of Conduct, on the registration by members of their interests as required by the new Code of Conduct, and of the situation so far as Parish Councils are concerned.

Recommendation(s) : To note the action proposed to be taken by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services as set out in paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 of report.

Key decision : No

Portfolio Holder : Not applicable

Scrutiny Responsibility : Not applicable

Ward(s) affected : All

Report Approved by : Jeremy Thomas (Legal)
Nichola Stretton (Finance)

Policy Framework : Not applicable

1. Introduction

- 1.1 I reported to the September meeting that the City Council had adopted the new Members' Code of Conduct on 25th June 2007. I said that all City Councillors had completed their register of members' interests under the new Code. I said the training was underway. I reported upon the position as far as the four parish councils in Oxford and their parish councillors were concerned, on Code adoption, training and registration of interests.

2. Training

- 2.1 We have now completed our Code of Conduct training. We carried out 11 training sessions, at various times of the day and in the evening. We also went out to Littlemore to carry out training for Littlemore and Risinghurst and Sandhills Parish Councillors. 125 people attended the training sessions, and they were a mix of members of the City Council, Parish Councillors, members of staff and the Chair of the Standards Committee.
- 2.2 Six City Councillors did not attend any of the training sessions despite exhortations. We have pointed out to all councillors that when the Standards Board for England commences investigations into alleged breaches one of the first questions asked is what training has been offered and taken. Members and Clerks for three of our four Parish Councils attended training sessions. One Parish Council was not represented at any training session.

3. Parish Councils

- 3.1 Each Parish Council has adopted the new Members' Code of Conduct. However, not all parish councillors have completed the register of interests under the Code. The register has to be completed within 28 days of adoption. This is a Code requirement. The situation as far as I can tell (because some parish councils run with vacancies and I am not all together sure that the information set out below in that respect is up to date) is as follows:-
- Blackbird Leys – 14 seats – 11 seats filled - 6 register of interests forms received
 - Littlemore – 21 seats – 9 seats filled - 9 register of interest forms received
 - Old Marston – 12 seats – 12 seats filled – 12 register of interest forms received
 - Risinghurst and Sandhills – 16 seats – 11 seats filled - no register of interests forms received. (There has been a recent change of Clerk at this Parish Council).

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 I have sent to the City Councillors who have not attended a training session a pack of material relating to the Code (i.e. the papers that formed the training material). We will run further

training sessions after the May 2008 local elections when there will be new members of the City Council. We will offer refresher training at that stage to all members of Council.

- 4.2 I and my colleagues remain willing to attend Parish Council meetings to train on the Code, and generally. I will remind Parish Clerks of that standing offer. As to the non-completion by Parish Councillors of the register of interests, I will write formally to the Clerks to say that this is a Code requirement (and the risks that they run, both reputational and otherwise as a result of non-completion). I will list the members who have completed the register of interests and ask the Clerks to bring my letter to the attention of those Parish Councillors who have not completed the register of interests.

Name and contact details of author:-

William Reed
Democratic Services Manager
Town Hall Oxford OX1 4EY
Tel: 01865 252230 e-mail: wreed@oxford.gov.uk

Background papers: None