

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Friday 19th September 2008
and Tuesday 11th November 2008

PRESENT : The Chair (John Lay), the Vice-Chair (Anne Gwinnett), Councillors Brundin, Dhall, Sanders and Smith; Meryll Dean and Martin Gardner (independent members); Fred Mogridge (parish council representative).

COUNCIL OFFICERS PRESENT : Lindsay Cane (Deputy Monitoring Officer), Helen Lynch (Solicitor) and William Reed (Clerk to the Committee).

27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Craft and from Chris Ballinger (independent member).

28. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Dhall declared an interest in the business before the Committee as a County Councillor for the West Central Oxford Electoral Division that included East Street, Osney.

29. MATTERS EXEMPT FROM PUBLICATION

The Committee considered whether to resolve to exclude the press and public from the remaining business of the Committee on the grounds contained in paragraph 7A of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (information that is subject to an obligation of confidentiality).

Frances Randle, solicitor, representing Councillor Pressel argued that the matter (of alleged failure to comply with the Members' Code of Conduct and of the felling of trees in East Street, Osney) that the Committee was to consider had already been made sufficiently public that the public interest in holding the meeting in open session outweighed the public interest in maintaining the exemption (i.e. to resolve to exclude the press and public). Gylan Murphy, solicitor, representing the Standards Board for England argued that as the actions of staff, some of whom were still employed by the Council, would inevitably be under scrutiny, the public interest in maintaining the exemption (i.e. to resolve to exclude the press and public) outweighed the public interest in holding the meeting in open session.

Having listened to the arguments, and in the knowledge that the Committee's eventual decision and the reasons for it would be made public, the Committee decided that the press and public should be excluded, and accordingly resolved in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the remaining business of the Committee on the grounds contained in paragraph 7A of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act and that the Committee were satisfied that in all the circumstances of the case the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

Summary of business transacted by the Committee as required by Section 100C(2) of the Local Government Act 1972

The Committee decided that Councillor Pressel had, by copying an email to members of the public in which she had accused a junior officer of lying and a senior officer and other officers and members of Council (unspecified) of dishonesty and lack of good management, had failed to comply with paragraph 2(b) of the Members' Code of Conduct. Paragraph 2(b) required members to treat others with respect. The Committee decided that the appropriate form of sanction for the failure to comply was a sanction.