

COUNCIL MEETING

26 JULY 2010

TRANSCRIPT RELATING TO ANNUAL REPORT FROM STANDARDS COMMITTEE AFTER COUNCILLOR TODD HAD PRESENTED THE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONTINUES.....

Mayor

Cllr Sandford I understand you wish to move a Motion which is set out in the Members Orders Paper.

Cllr Sandford

It's actually an amendment to the proposal which is put forward. I will briefly explain what we want to do.

We want to take note of the work carried out by the Standards Committee and agree with the Government's intention to abolish the Standards Board but we want to reduce the number of meetings that the current Committee holds to the minimum which is required.

It would be very easy just to allow this proposal to go through but we saw at the beginning of the item on the Planning application at the first iteration of this Council meeting the farce that Standards Committee procedures have actually descended to and we had loads and loads of Members having to put their hands up declaring interest and leave the Chamber. Nobody questions the dedication of the Independent Members of the Standards Committee have put forward over almost a 10 year actual period but the system which they have been helping to administer has become a bureaucratic nightmare and a very expensive one.

A recent statement by Andrea Stunnell who is a Local Governmentwho is one of the Ministers in CLG said that, 'in the past 12 months the National Standards Board and all its paraphernalia have cost taxpayers almost £8 million and in that time its investigated a thousand complaints, so that is nearly £8,000 for each of the complaints that it has actually put forward and that does not include the burden of expense and bureaucracy that's been imposed on Peterborough City Council and every other local authority in the country by this monstrous and unnecessary quango.

You could actually question what it has achieved, you know we have had some Councils have had cases that have gone on for over a 3 year period and have cost over £0.5 million for an individual case. Responsible hardworking Councillors have had their reputations blighted by scurrilous accusations that have been put forward, but the thing that really makes this ridiculous is all the arguments that we get in to about whether Councillor so and so has a personal interest or whether it is a prejudicial interest and what the net result of all of this is, is that quite often the Councillors that have the most detailed information about a particular case or a particular proposal are the ones that find themselves excluded. Now that is not healthy for democracy.

It has been suggested in this report that we should continue to have a Standards Committee but the national regime ought to be abolished. Now we are not clear precisely what the Government is proposing but the Government has said that the entire regime is absolutely under question. As far as the Liberal Democrat group is concerned we do not want to keep the current Code of Conduct, lets have something nice and simple and straight forward regulating the behaviour of Councillors but not this massive bureaucratic thing, and can I remind you that our Code of Conduct is not something that we have drawn up it is something that has been imposed on us and we need to scrap that and we need to move to a simpler more straightforward system and can I just remind you also just finally those Councillors who were on the Council in the year 2000, can I remind you of what we had when we had our own Committee before the National Standards Board we had the Conservative Group refusing to enforce any recommendations that the Standards Committee put forward. We actually had Councillors making tit for tat accusations, it was not a very pleasant situation and it is not something I would like to see us returning to.

Now it says in the report that the Standards Board wants to keep things as they are, business as usual is the proposal. Well of course they are saying that because their jobs, the jobs of all the people employed by this quango earning hundreds of thousands of pounds, their jobs depends on keeping things the same. Lets take time, lets not continue with the Committee, we have to keep the Committee because it may need to have meetings that may be obliged if somebody makes a complaint then the Committee has to hold a meeting, but lets wait for the Government's proposals to be put forward and then lets see if we in Peterborough can come up with a simpler Code of Conduct and a simpler regime than the beaurocratic monstrosity that has been imposed on us.

Mayor

Thank you Cllr Sandford. Do we have a Seconder?

Cllr Miners

I wish to second the motion and reserve the right to speak.

Mayor

Thank you. Cllr Miners.

Cllr Miners

Thank you Mr Mayor.

In my opinion it is essential that a Standards regime of some form is maintained and strengthened locally. We only have to look to our recent past history in Peterborough City Council to acknowledge how important it is to maintain high local Government standards from Councillors. Noting that local Government can sometimes be volatile with some strong personalities it is imperative a strong, well trained committee is kept functioning at Peterborough City Council and meets when it determines it is necessary and not Big Brother.

Thank you.

Mayor

Thank you. Cllr Ash.

Cllr Ash

I must admit that when I read this I thought that I could support that, then I heard Cllr Sandford speak and he changed my mind. He actually spoke to me against what I thought he was trying to do. I have come to the conclusion from hearing him speak and a couple of things I would like to raise.

He gave me the impression that he thought something there was needed when he was speaking, perhaps I have got that wrong, no doubt when he sums up he can correct me but he also mentioned about planning. Now planning has a *quasi-judicial* role and therefore we are governed by rules and regulations beyond the Standards panel.

Cllr Sandford

Just a moment Mr Mayor, I wasn't aware that I was talking about the planning applications, that is an entirely separate issue and I am happy to talk about that but probably don't have the chance to so.

Cllr Ash

In that case then I wonder why you mentioned it, so you have totally confused me completely now. You said one thing now you are saying something different. I am not really sure where you are heading and really I think I am inclined to agree with Cllr Miners, I think for our own interests, I think we need something. If we start making up the rules ourselves we are going to be heading the same way that they went in Parliamentary allowances and what not by making up your own rules and I think that is dangerous, so therefore I am afraid I agree with my colleague Cllr Miners and I can't support.

Mayor

Cllr Cereste

Cllr Cereste

Thank you Mr Mayor.

I wish Nick had not said as much, it was much simpler before he had opened his mouth. The motion before us, actually if you read the motion probably makes sense without all the political rhetoric around it. Obviously we note the work carried out by the Standards Committee, we know that Government intends to change the regime and its absolutely right that until we get a Government that changes the regime we have something in place that makes sure that we don't misbehave. I think that is all the motion says and I don't really know why we are making such a big hash of it. If it's the motion as it is then that probably makes sense but I wish you hadn't said all that rubbish around it Nick.

Mayor

Thank you Cllr Cereste.

Here we are talking about the motion that is on the paper in front of you.

Cllr Shaheed you've reserved your right to speak would you like to?

Then Cllr Sandford would you like to sum up.

Cllr Sandford

Do I actually have the right to sum up in putting in an amendment?

Mayor

We will just check that one out.

Helen Edwards

As far as I am concerned Cllr Sandford you actually moved the motion because there was not actually another motion on the table to amend so you do have the right to sum up should you wish to do so briefly.

Cllr Sandford

Ok I'll just be very brief because I can see that our colleagues here seem to have some exception to this. I wasn't being political I wasn't aware that I was making any party political point, I was just saying that yes perhaps we do need something in place so that we have got rules that we go by, we've got a Constitution and we've got the Member Officer Protocol. We've got a number of things, but those are the things that we drew up. What we are talking about here is a Code of Conduct that we didn't draw up, one that was imposed on us and I would just ask you to think about how its been operating, the number of times that you are not really sure whether you have got a personal interest or prejudicial interest or whatever. Can I remind you that if you go back to before the 2000 Local Government Act people used to have to leave the room if they had a clear pecuniary interest, so if they would financially benefit from something, and I would just suggest to you something simple like that. That is something that we ought to be aiming for.

Mayor

Thank you. Then we will move to the vote.

All those in favour of the motion would you please show.

Thank you.

All those against.

It took a long while to count one.

Anybody abstaining.

Thank you.

That was 31 for, 1 against with 6 not voting so the motion is carried.

Thank you.