

**Press Release - 18 August 2008**

**'Aggressive' behaviour leads to 12-month disqualification**

A husband and wife who were members of a Cornwall parish council have been disqualified from office for a year after their 'aggressive' behaviour saw the parish clerk and their three fellow councillors resign.

The ban, imposed at a hearing of the independent Adjudication Panel for England on 24 July, follows an investigation by the Standards Board for England into allegations that Peter and Sheila Montague failed to treat others with respect and brought their office into disrepute.

It was alleged that Peter and Sheila Montague behaved in an aggressive, intimidating and disrespectful way to fellow parish councillors and a member of the public in council meetings between May and June 2007. It was also alleged they made verbal and written attacks on the character and integrity of the ex-clerk to the council.

The Adjudication Panel for England concluded that the language in emails written by Mr Montague and approved by Mrs Montague was rude and unjustified. The Adjudication Panel found that Mr Montague was aggressive when speaking to another councillor, had suggested that the clerk had acted without authority for his own purposes and that his conduct was unacceptable for a council meeting.

The Adjudication Panel also found that Mrs Montague's shouting when other councillors disagreed with her was also unacceptable, as was the Montagues' behaviour at a meeting on 29 June 2007. They shouted at, talked over and interrupted other councillors, were aggressive, overbearing and rude, and without justification, questioned the clerk's integrity. The Adjudication Panel was satisfied that Mr and Mrs Montague's conduct brought their office into disrepute because their behaviour seriously affected the wellbeing of several individuals and damaged the normal running of the council by prompting the clerk and the other three members to resign.

Dr Robert Chilton, chair of the Standards Board for England said:

"To maintain public confidence in local government, it is essential that councillors' conduct meets the high ethical standards which the electorate has every right to expect from them. Mr and Mrs Montague's behaviour fell far short of those standards.

"Their conduct led to the resignation of the council's clerk and three other councillors, depriving the parish council of representation for nearly a year. The disqualification for a year recognises the seriousness of the behaviour and its consequences."

## **Press Release - 31 July 2008**

### **Local authorities tackling complaints about members**

Councils and authorities across England have logged 360 complaints about the conduct of their members in the first few weeks of England's new locally-based complaints system.

Prior to May 2008 all complaints went to national body the Standards Board for England, who assessed them to see whether they were worthy of investigation, either by the local authority or by the Standards Board itself.

Now local standards committees are assessing complaints themselves - to ensure they are robust and relevant - before deciding whether to refer them for investigation. An average of 295 complaints a month were handled by the Standards Board last year, who referred around one case in every seven for investigation, weeding out vexatious or politically motivated complaints.

As a national regulator responsible for monitoring and promoting ethical standards the Standards Board for England collects quarterly returns from standards committees about their work. The first returns covered the period May 8 - June 30 2008, and showed that 164 English local authorities had 360 cases 'in the system'. A further 279 authorities said they had no cases to report in this first few weeks.

Dr Robert Chilton, Chair of the Standards Board, said: "We can see that a good proportion of local authorities are now gaining first hand experience of their new role in receiving complaints and we wait with interest to see whether the change to a local framework will bring a change to the pattern of cases referred for investigation both locally and to the Standards Board.

"The Standards Board is working closely with local authorities and government agencies to ensure good standards of member conduct are at the heart of local government. We want to make sure there is a transparent, effective local standards system, backed up by effective local investigation and principled decision making, which will make a big contribution towards building confidence in local democracy."