

Standards Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 15th April, 2008.

Present:-

Co-opted Independent Members:-

The Reverend Paul Lipscomb (Chair), Dr Henna Khan, Mr Fred Ashmore and Mr Mike Field

Elected Members:-

Councillors The Reverend Paul Lipscomb (Chair), Dhaliwal, Finn, Latif Khan, Mann and O'Connor

Parish Councillor Representative:-

Britwell Parish Councillor Nicoline Brandligt

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Aziz

PART I

26. Declarations of Interest

None.

27. Minutes of the last Meeting of the Committee held on 13th February 2008

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 13th February, 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

28. Standards Committee Terms of Reference

The Council's Constitution required the Committee, in conjunction with the Monitoring Officer, to produce an annual report for submission to Full Council on matters within the purview of the Committee. Currently the Standards Committee's annual report was submitted to Council for approval and the view was that as the report was the Committee's own account of its actions for the preceding year it should be submitted to Council for information only. This would not preclude the Council from commenting on the content of the report and making recommendations thereon to the Committee if it so wished.

Accordingly, it was proposed that sub-paragraph 8 (i) of Article 9 in Part 2 and the corresponding section in Part 3 of the Constitution should be amended to read as follows:-

“In conjunction with the Monitoring Officer to produce an annual report for submission to Council for information on matters within the purview of the Committee.”

Resolved - That the Member Panel on the Constitution be recommended to approve the amendment of sub-paragraph 8 (i) of Article 9 in

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Part 2 and the corresponding section in Part 3 of the Constitution to provide for the submission of the Standards Committee's annual report to Council for information only.

29. Report back on Meetings with Group Leaders

The Director of Law and Corporate Governance recalled that the Audit Commission's Ethical Governance Survey had highlighted certain issues which needed to be addressed to ensure that ethical governance was embedded within the Authority. An action plan had been put in place to seek to address these matters and the action plan had been formally approved by the Committee in November 2007.

There were two particular issues that the Committee were keen to address in the short term namely, the apparent poor attendance at compulsory training sessions and the behaviour of Members at certain meetings particularly Council.

On 3rd and 25th January, 2008 the Chair of the Committee had met with the three Group Leaders and the Chief Executive when the matter predominantly under discussion had been Members' behaviour. The Chair reported back in detail on the outcome of the meeting on the 3rd January, 2008 when the following "ground rules" which all Members would be expected to follow were agreed:-

- That the Office of the Mayor be respected.
- That the Mayor's rulings and authority be respected and observed by all Members.
- Members should wait to be called to speak and not interrupt others, especially with spurious points of order.
- There should only be one speaker at any time – Members should respect each other and remain silent while another Member is speaking. There should be no secondary meetings, undercurrent of noise and/or background chatter.
- If Members have points of personal explanation they should wait until the end of the debate.
- Members should respect the fact that the Mayor and the Officers are trying to keep the meeting running smoothly and should support not undermine the Officers when providing advice to the Mayor and to the meeting.

The Director of Law and Corporate Governance reported that at the meeting on the 25th January, the general view, in the light of events at the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 8th January, 2008, was that the behaviour of Members had improved. At this meeting consideration had been given as to whether or not the layout of the Council Chamber could be rearranged to assist debate. In addition the Officers were requested to investigate the possibility of the Council Chamber speaker system being enhanced so that Members could indicate, through the system, if they wished to speak. As agreed at this meeting a summary of the discussions and agreements reached were reported to all Members through their Weekly Information Bulletin.

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The Chair referred to reports he had received regarding Members' behaviour at the Council Meeting on Monday, 14th April, 2008. These were that some Members' behaviour at the meeting had been disgraceful and it was clear that the "ground rules" agreed with the Group Leaders were not being observed. It was his view that the Group Leaders had responsibility for addressing this issue. He indicated that it had been agreed that the Group Leaders, Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and himself should meet at least three times a year to review Members' behaviour at all Council and Committee meetings and in view of recent events he indicated that he would be requesting that such a meeting should be called as soon as possible. The outcome of any such meeting would be reported back to the Committee.

Resolved - That the Report and current position be noted.

30. Work Programme 2007/2009

The Member Services Manager submitted for information the Standards Committee's latest work programme which covered the period April, 2007 to January 2009.

Attention was drawn to the fact that it had not been possible to submit to this meeting the report on proposed local arrangements for the "local filter" for handling complaints as the relevant enabling Regulations had still not been published by the Department of Communities and Local Government. The Director of Law and Corporate Governance advised the Committee that the Regulations were expected to be published within the next week or so. As soon after receipt of the new Regulations as practicable, a special meeting of the Committee would be called to consider proposed arrangements for implementation of the local filter for handling complaints. At this meeting the Committee would also be asked to review its terms of reference in the light of any changes necessitated by the implementation of the local managed framework.

The Committee was also advised that submission of the report on gifts and hospitality declared by Members had been deferred to the 16th June, 2008 meeting. This would enable a report to be submitted for the whole of the municipal year 2007/8. It would also cover the period since the revised Code of Conduct required all Members to register gifts and hospitality of over £25 in value as a personal interest in the Register of Members' Interests.

Resolved - That the position be noted.

31. Vote of Thanks

Resolved -

- (a) That the Committee place on record its thanks, appreciation and gratitude to the Chair of the Committee, The Reverend Paul Lipscomb and to the other Independent Members, Mr Fred Ashmore, Mr Mike Field and Dr Henna Khan for the time they have given and the invaluable contribution they made to the work of the Standards Committee.

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- (b) That the Committee place on record its thanks for the support provided by the Officers over the past Municipal Year.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.15 p.m. and closed at 6.28 p.m.)