

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Standards Committee **DATE:** 15th April, 2008

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WARDS: All

PART I **FOR INFORMATION**

FEEDBACK ON MEETINGS WITH GROUP LEADERS

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to summarise the issues discussed and agreements reached at two meetings held on 3rd and 25th January, 2008 on some poor behaviour by Members at Council meetings.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report and make any recommendations they consider appropriate.

3. Key Priorities

- 3.1 The majority of Council meetings (including Committee and Sub-Committee meetings) are held in public and thus it is imperative that decisions are taken in an open, transparent and orderly fashion. Those elected by the residents of Slough should lead by example given that ethical governance is the cornerstone to clear and sound decision making.

4. Financial, Staffing and Legal (including Human Rights) Implications

- 4.1 There are no significant financial, staffing or legal implications arising from this report.
- 4.2 However, where complaints are made about Member behaviour to the Standards Board for England the investigation of those complaints will by their nature have some staffing implications and where a complaint is upheld sanctions may have some legal implications for individual Members.

5. Background/Supporting Information

- 5.1 As Members will be aware the Audit Commission Ethical Governance Survey highlighted certain issues that had not been achieved in order to ensure that ethical governance was embedded within the Authority. An action plan was put in place to

seek to address those matters and that action plan was formally approved by the Committee in November this year.

5.2 However there were two particular issues that the Committee were keen to address in the short term namely the apparent lack of attendance at compulsory training sessions and the behaviour of Members at certain meetings particularly full Council.

5.3 There has been general acceptance that where Members have busy lives outside of the Council it is sometimes difficult to attend Council (including Committee and Sub-Committee) meetings and compulsory training sessions but it was felt that some improvement was required particularly where Officers had been inconvenienced by presenting compulsory training sessions more than once or even twice.

5.4 The meeting of the Group Leaders held on 3rd and 25th January, 2008 concentrated on Member behaviour and at the meeting on the 3rd the following "ground rules" were laid down by which all Members would be expected to follow:-

- 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.

5.5 An Extraordinary Council Meeting took place on 8th January, 2008 and at the Group Leaders' meeting on the 25th there was a general view that the behaviour of Members had improved and there was consideration as to whether or not the layout of the Council Chamber could be rearranged to assist the debate. In addition to that Officers were requested to investigate the possibility of the speaker system being enhanced so that Members could, through the system, indicate if they wished to speak. Finally a summary of the discussions and agreements would be distributed through the Members' Information Bulletin. This has already taken place.

5.6 The Chair of the Committee and the Monitoring Officer will give further oral update at the meeting.

6. Conclusion

6.1 It is pleasing to report that there has been some improvement in Member behaviour at Council meetings but it will be important for Members to maintain such improvement and continue to comply with the actions referred to in this report.