

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 25 JANUARY 2016

PRESENT:- Councillor David Wood (Chair), Councillors Michael Bray, Richard Hurley, Teresa Page, Eric Shaw and Vera Tomlinson.
Messrs Keith Strickland, Paul Morris, Trevor Davies, Richard Hailstone and Mike Compton.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Fay Howard and Maureen Penny and Mr David Dawson.

16. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded members of the need to declare known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting.

No declarations of interest were made.

17. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th October 2015 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

18. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

19. Exempt Items - Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved - That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded during the discussion of the matters referred to in the items listed below on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the respective paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

<u>Item No.</u>	<u>Paragraph Nos.</u>	<u>Minute No.</u>
8	1 and 2	23

20. Question and Answer Session - Leader of the Council and Interim Chief Executive

Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, and John Gilbert, the Interim Chief Executive, were in attendance to report to the Committee on matters relating to the Council's ethical governance framework and issues of probity and to discuss with members the key priorities for ensuring that high ethical standards continue to be promoted and maintained within the Council.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Leader of the Council addressed the meeting on his view of the efficacy of the Council's ethical framework and its embedding within the organisation as an easily recognised platform for member behaviours when representing the Authority. He emphasised the importance of the framework in establishing the standards for the manner in which members carried out their various duties and responsibilities and as the means by which public confidence and trust in the work of the Council can be promoted and maintained. The Leader recognised the role played by the Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer in supporting the ethical framework and congratulated members on their hard work and diligence in promoting and maintaining the highest standards of conduct by councillors and co-opted members. It was his view that the Council had, in place, a suite of relevant and effective practices to address all eventualities and that the Standards Committee had exhibited a level of commitment to the function that not only promoted best practice and the upholding of standards but had shown its diligence in making recommendations to Council when it considered standards of conduct and behaviour needed to be reviewed and where the level of commitment necessary to resolve these difficulties should be enhanced.

The Interim Chief Executive endorsed the Leader of the Council's viewpoint, adding that the Council, as part of its ongoing performance management regime, and in relation to the promotion of expected behaviours and values, placed a high level of importance on extending this ethical foundation into its external service contracts and ensuring its contracted service providers comply with the Council's ethical standards.

Following their opening remarks, the Leader and Interim Chief Executive responded to members' questions and observations on the following issues:

- Trends evidenced in feedback from staff surveys and whether continuing austerity and fiscal challenges were having an identifiable effect on staff morale and motivation.
- The accessibility of the Chief Executive by staff, particularly through social media platforms and other informal methods of communication.
 - The Council's recognition of social media as a valid means of communication and the protocols around such social media usage.
- The officers' code of conduct and the effectiveness of that ethical framework in establishing standards for workplace behaviour and personal conduct.
- The challenge of ensuring that corporate ethics are maintained in relation to the use by members and officers of a greater diversity of social media platforms and other informal communications options.
- The Leader of the Council's view of the strength of member/officer relationships in progressing corporate objectives and priorities and whether continuing austerity measures and the fiscal pressures faced by the Council on a daily basis had led to any significant straining of those relationships.
- The members' planning code of good practice and issues that had been raised by members.
- The future of the localities' team, its focus going forward and options for enhancing the Council's engagement with the wider public.
- The noticeable increase in the number of Parish Councillor Code of Conduct complaints and possible implications for ethical training provision for Parish Councils.

Resolved – That Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, and the Interim Chief Executive be thanked for attending the meeting and for their full and open responses to members questions on matters relating to the Council's ethical governance framework and issues of probity.

21. Ethical Framework Update

The Committee received a report from the Director of Law and Democratic Services providing an update on matters relating to the Ethical Framework, including:

- Dispensations.
- Code of Conduct Complaints.
- Member Training.
- Effectiveness of training and development following a reference from the Member Development Advisory Group.
- Whistleblowing – the launch of the NSPCC helpline.
- Promotion of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.
- CIPFA – Online guidance on ethical standards for public service providers.
- The workshop on the role of the Independent Person.

Resolved – (1) That the Ethical Framework update be noted.

(2) That Minute 7 of the Member Development Advisory Group (MDAG), responding to the Committee's concerns regarding the effectiveness of member training and development and the need to clarify the member functions and roles, be noted.

(3) That the MDAGs proposal to introduce feedback forms for delegates attending training sessions and to review of the analysis of that feedback, be welcomed and that the MDAG training session feedback analysis be submitted to this Committee for consideration.

(4) That it be noted that it was the MDAGs intention to consider member training requirements in relation to the Council's changing perspective from service delivery to contract management and, specifically, the new role of members and the particular skill sets they would require to allow them to best respond to that changed functionality.

(5) That the launch of the NSPCC national whistleblowing helpline for employees wishing to raise concerns about a child at risk of abuse be noted and that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to update the Council's own whistleblowing policy to include the helpline contact telephone number once this is available, and details of the new OFSTED guidance on whistleblowing.

(6) That members' comments regarding a possible gap in member training provision, relating to the specific skills required to effectively chair meetings of the Council's Licensing Panel, be noted and that the Monitoring Officer discuss this issue further with the Member Training Support Officer and the Clerk to the Licensing Panel.

22. Review of Council Codes and Protocols

Further to Minute 14(3) and (4), the Committee received a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services inviting members to review the following Codes and Protocols.

- Members' Code of Conduct.
- Officers' Code of Conduct.
- Monitoring Officer Protocol.

- Councillor Role Definitions.
- Guidance to Councillors on dealings with the media.
- Protocol of Member/Officer Relationships.
- Local Code of Governance.
- Members Planning Code of Good Practice.
- Public Question Time at Council Meetings.
- Recording, Photography and use of social media.

It was noted that, in accordance with the Committee's instruction, a consultation process on the codes and protocols had been undertaken with:

- Members of the Standards Committee.
- All Parish Councils.
- The Political Groups on the Council (via the Political Assistants and Councillor Stan Pajak (on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group)).
- Board Directors and Heads of Service.

It was further noted that no submissions had been received in response to the consultation exercise undertaken in relation to the Council's Codes and Protocols which the Committee took as positive affirmation as to the working of the various Codes and Protocols and the previous annual reviews.

Resolved – That the Council's current Codes and Protocols, as submitted to this meeting, be approved for inclusion in the Council's Constitution for 2016/17.

23. Ethical Compliance Report

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services regarding the outcome of various ethical framework compliance matters, including the details of Whistleblowing cases, breaches of the member/officer relations protocol and Code of Conduct Complaints received since the last Committee and the outcome of any completed investigations in relation to these. The Head of Internal Audit introduced the section of the report relating to whistleblowing cases and members noted the enhanced level of information provided.

Resolved – (1) That the Ethical Framework Compliance report be noted.
(2) That the enhanced level of information provided in this report in relation to whistleblowing cases, as requested by members previously, be accepted.