

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 25 JANUARY 2016

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.