

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 23 JULY 2007

PRESENT:- Mr Trevor Davies (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Mr Mike Compton, Councillor Melanie Duff and Councillor Maurice Fanning.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Keith Carby.

1. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

2. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 30th April 2007, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Further to Minute 36(4) the Committee noted that 78 Parish Councillors and 11 Parish Clerks had attended the training set up for them on the New Model Code of Conduct.

3. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

4. 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 in Agenda Item 9 on the grounds that it would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information concerned (Minute 8 refers.)

5. Anti-Fraud & Corruption Strategy and Whistleblowing Procedure

The Committee considered the updated Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy, Whistleblowing Policy, Fraud Response Plan and Fraud Awareness Guide. The Committee had requested at its meeting on 29th January that the policies be brought back for approval following appropriate consultation with relevant parties, which had now taken place.

The Committee noted that the Fraud Response Plan had been amended as a result of consultation to place flow charts for action at the front of the publication and the duplication between the documents had been removed. The Committee requested a minor amendment to the Whistleblowing Policy to provide staff with contact details if staff wished to take complaints outside of the Council.

Resolved:- 1) That the Committee approve the adoption of the updated Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy, the Whistleblowing Policy, and the Fraud Response Plan as amended; and

2) That the Head of Internal Audit be authorised to roll out the Fraud Awareness Guidance to relevant Members and Officers.

6. Annual Report and Work Programme

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) asking the Committee to consider and approve its Annual Report for 2006/07 and agree its work programme for the current municipal year (2007/08).

The Committee discussed the importance of evidencing compliance with ethical standards, and noted that the Monitoring Officer had now issued reminders to a number of Councillors of the need to return declarations of interest forms under the new Code of Conduct, even if already completed under the old code.

Resolved – 1) That the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2006/07 be approved and forwarded to Full Council for information.

2) That the Committee Work Programme for 2007/08 be agreed.

3) That Councillors on the Standards Committee raise with their Political Groups the importance of completing Declarations of Interests forms under the new Members Code of Conduct.

7. Ethical Framework Update

The Committee received a report from the Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) providing an update of various matters relating to the Ethical Framework in respect of:

- i) Local Filter Pilot – The Monitoring Officer advised that the Committee's comments and decisions on the Local Filter Pilot had been provided to the Standards Board, and the Monitoring Officer would report back with feedback when received.
- ii) Ethical Audit – The Committee received a copy of the Ethical Audit Matrix, which had been updated to show progress on the actions agreed at the last meeting.
- iii) Learning and Development Update – The Committee noted the update on training undertaken by Members since the beginning of the municipal year.
- iv) Revision of the Media Guidelines – The Committee received for approval the revised Media Guidelines, which had been updated following consultation with Group Leaders and discussions with the Cabinet and Labour Group about the principles of media relations.
- v) Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire Independent Standards Committee Members' Forum – Members received the minutes of the meeting held on 20th April 2007, and were advised of the next meeting to be held on 19th October in Wokingham.
- vi) Standards Board – The Committee received the Standards Board Bulletins for May 2007 (Issue 33) and July 2007 (Issue 34) and noted key areas of interest for the work of the Standards Committee. Trevor Davies and Mike Compton had attended the recent Standards Board Roadshow held in Swindon, relating to the new code of conduct and the issues of bias and pre-determination. Members were invited to contact the Monitoring Officer if wishing to attend the Board's Annual Conference on 15th -16th October 2007.

Resolved - 1) That the Ethical Framework Update be noted; and

(2) That the Media Guidelines for Members (attached as an Appendix to the Report) be approved and incorporated in the Constitution.

8. Ethical Framework Compliance Update

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) and the Head of Internal Audit, concerning the progress and outcome of various ethical framework compliance matters including whistleblowing complaint investigations and a breach of the Member / Officer protocol. It was noted that no complaints to the Standards Board for England had been notified since the last meeting.

Resolved – That the report in respect of ethical framework compliance issues be noted.