

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 24 JULY 2006

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

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Keith Carby and Councillor Melanie Duff.

1. Declarations of Interest

The Vice-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 31st May 2006, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Matters Arising – The Director of Law and Democratic Services advised that Councillor Lister had not submitted an appeal against the decision of the Committee. The Director advised that the Committee's recommendations in respect of the minuting of meetings and the role of the Chair were being put in place.

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. Employee Code of Conduct

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Human Resources and Cabinet Member for Corporate Affairs, seeking the Committee's approval of a Code of Conduct for Swindon Borough Council employees. The Code was underpinned by a range of supporting policies, and had been considered by the Committee in a draft form in March 2006 during the consultation phase, and the changes incorporated.

Resolved – That the 'Swindon Borough Council – Code of Conduct for Swindon Borough Council employees be approved and adopted and that the Director of Human Resources proceed to ensure its implementation.

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 2005/06 and agree its work programme for the current municipal year (2006/07). It was noted that the annual report (supported by minutes and agendas of the Committee) demonstrated that the Monitoring Officer and Committee were proactive in promoting and maintaining high ethical standards in the Council, including appropriate monitoring of standards and training for Members and Officers.

Resolved – 1) That the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2005/06 be approved and forwarded to full Council for information, subject to following amendments:

- Page 4 be amended to record that Mr Mike Compton was formally appointed to the Committee by the Swindon Area Committee of Wiltshire Association of local Councils.
- Page 12 be amended to record that ethical training for Members had included participation in case study exercises.

2) That the Committee Work Programme for 2006/07 attached at Annex '1' be agreed.

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 relation to Promotion of Ethical Standards, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that all members elected in May 2006 had either attended the Induction course on Ethics and Probity, or attended individual sessions, and had completed their register of interests. Each Councillors' entry could be accessed via the Council's website, and the Monitoring Officer regularly inspected the register. All staff had received information about the work of the Standards Committee and a reminder of the whistleblowing policy in the Team Brief for May 2006.

The Committee received Standards Board Bulletins for April and May 2006 and noted matters of interest, and received the minutes of the Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire Independent Standards Committee Forum held in April.

The Committee were advised of the Annual Standards Conference to be held in October and invited to notify the Monitoring Officer if they wished to attend. The Committee agreed to move the date of the next Committee in order to avoid a clash with the conference.

Finally, the Committee received an application from the new Association of Independent Members of Standards Committees in England (AIMSce) for financial support for the set up of the Association, and to provide membership fees for Independent Members of the Standards Committee to attend. Mr Trevor Davies (Independent Member) stated his own view that although he would not wish to stop any independent members from signing up themselves, he would not wish the association to be supported by the Council. He felt that an association separating out independent members, undermined the role that each complete Standards Committee comprising independents, members and parish representatives, sought to perform within each local Council, and their role of making representations nationally. He advised that this view had been supported by the Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire Independent Members Forum. The Standards Committee

concurred with this view.

Resolved – 1) That the Ethical Framework Update be noted;

2) That individual independent members can join the Association of Independent Members of Standards Committees in England (AIMSce) using their allowances, but that no additional financial support be given by the Council for the set up of the Association;

3) That the date of the next meeting of the Standards Committee be moved to 23rd October; and

4) That Standards Committee Members wishing to attend the annual Standards Board Conference on 16th and 17th October 2006 advise the Monitoring Officer as quickly as possible.

8. Ethical Framework Compliance Update

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) concerning the outcome of various ethical framework compliance matters. It was noted that a number of complaints had been referred to the Standards Board for investigation and all but one had been dismissed as not requiring investigation. One complaint was to be referred to the Monitoring Officer for local investigation and determination.

The Committee received a copy of the Swindon Internal Audit Services Fraud Bulletin Number 3 for information.

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

Standards Committee
Work Programme for 2006 / 2007

The following work programme is proposed:

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Agenda Item</u>
24 July 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt Employee Code of Conduct • Consider draft Annual Report for 2005/06 • Agree future Work Programme
16-17 October 2006	Standards Board Annual Conference
23 October 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider consultation on CIPFA (The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy)/ SOLACE (the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives) 'Good Governance in Local Government: A Framework'. • Review Media Guidelines for Members • Update Procedures for Hearings • Update Anti-Fraud Strategy and Whistleblowing Policy.
23 January 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Ethical Audit.
19 March 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Council Codes and Protocols.

Regular Items:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical Update Report • Monitor complaints under the Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and Whistleblowing Policy. • Receive updates on complaints against Councillors received by the Standards Board for England and Wales. • Receive updates on continuing close work with Parish Councils on Ethical Framework Issues. • Facilitate training as required for Officers, Councillors and Parish Councillors in respect of ethical framework issues.
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Other reports and Meetings as required:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allegations referred by the Standards Board for England for local determination. • Requests for dispensations. • Urgent ethical and probity issues as they arise. • Responding to Government Guidance, Regulations and Consultations as issued.
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