

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 23 OCTOBER 2006

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

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

9. 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.

10. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 24th July 2006, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

11. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

12. 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 7 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 14 refers.)

13. 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) Council Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) / Joint Area Review (JAR) Assessment – The Committee were informed of the Council Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) / Joint Area Review (JAR) judgement for the Council issued on 10th October 2006, and in particular the assessment that appropriate mechanisms were in place and effective in ensuring that ethical standards are maintained.
- ii) Annual Standards Board Conference - The Monitoring Officer reported back on the Conference held on 16th and 17th October, and highlighted the new presumption from the Standards Board in favour of local referrals of code of conduct allegations, and that the revised National Code of Conduct for Councillors had been delayed but was expected shortly.
- iii) Adjudication Panel Decisions - The Committee took note of the adjudication

- panel decisions and the seriousness placed on overstepping the mark in robust exchanges at Committee. The Committee asked that the Monitoring Officer in conjunction with the Chair continue with the current pro-active practice of contacting Borough Council Members involved in such exchanges, with a view to improving standards of conduct at the Council.
- iv) Promotion of Ethical Standards and Training – The Committee noted the ethical training undertaken by Councillors since May 2006 and that planned for Parish Councillors in November. The Monitoring Officer advised that further training would take place for Members once the new Code of Conduct was in place.
 - v) Standards Board Bulletin - The Committee received the Standards Board Bulletin for July 2006 (Issue 30).
 - vi) Independent Standards Committee Members Forum – The next meeting of the forum would be held on 27th October 2006. The Vice-Chair would be attending and would report back to the next meeting.
 - vii) Revision of Media Guidelines for Members - The Committee received for consideration proposed revised media guidelines for Members from the Head of Communications, which would form part of the revised Communications Strategy. The Committee agreed that the revised guidelines should go forward for consultation with all Members.
 - viii) Corporate Governance in Local Government – A Framework - The consultation by CIPFA / SOLACE on Corporate Governance and the response agreed by the Corporate Governance Working Group was noted. It was understood that a further revised paper would be issued in November or December, and it was agreed it was important that Members were fully engaged and understood the wider implications of good governance for the whole operation of the Council, not just ethical standards.
 - ix) Review of Procedure for Local Investigation of Referred Complaints – The Monitoring Officer advised that the procedure for local investigations of complaints referred by the Standards Board for England had been reviewed in the light of the recent investigation and hearing, but recommended that they be revisited after the completion of the current investigation relating to a Parish Councillor.
 - x) Update Anti-Fraud Strategy and Whistleblowing Policy - It was noted that the Head of Audit was currently reviewing the Anti-Fraud Strategy and Whistleblowing Policy and would report to the next meeting.
 - xi) Independent Remuneration Panel – The Vice-Chair, together with a former Member of the Panel, had conducted interviews on 19th October 2006 for the three vacancies on the Independent Remuneration Panel. The Vice-Chair advised the Committee of the recommendations from the interviews and asked that the Committee endorse the recommended appointments.

Resolved – 1) That the Ethical Framework Update be noted;
 2) That the Monitoring Officer in conjunction with the Chair continue the current pro-active practice of contacting Borough Council Members involved in overly robust exchanges at Committee, with a view to improving standards of conduct at the Council.
 3) That the Monitoring Officer in conjunction with the Head of Communications consult with Members on the revised Media Guidance for Members attached at Annex ‘1’ and report back with the final Guidance for approval to the Standards Committee;
 4) That the Monitoring Officer revisit the Procedures for Investigation and

Determination of Complaints following the completion of the current investigation relating to a Parish Councillor; and

5) That the Committee confirms the following three appointments to the Independent Remuneration Panel:

- Nigel Stone (appointment following public advertisement)
- Claire McDougall (representative of the Business Community)
- Professor Andy Stables (Education Sector)

14. 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 an investigating officer had been appointed in respect of the complaint concerning a Parish Councillor that has been referred to the Monitoring Officer for local investigation and determination.

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