

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY, 29 JANUARY 2013**

PRESENT:- Councillor David Wood (Chair), Councillor Richard Hurley (Vice-Chair), Councillor Mary Friend, Councillor Fay Howard, Councillor Teresa Page, Mr Trevor Davies, Mr David Dawson, Mr Mike Compton and Mr Richard Hailstone.

Mr Peter Morgan (Independent Person) was also in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rex Barnett and Mr Paul Morris (Independent Person).

**12. Question and Answer Session - Leader of the Council and Chief Executive**

The Leader of the Council, and the Chief Executive, attended the meeting to discuss the Council's approach to ethical governance, and their key priorities in relation to ensuring that high ethical standards were promoted and maintained within the Council.

It was appreciated that it had been an interesting year with implementation of the Localism Act 2011, and the adoption of a local Members Code of Conduct and arrangements for dealing with complaints under the Code. The Leader and Chief Executive agreed that the new local arrangements were working well in Swindon, and that this was not the experience across the country.

At the last question and answer session, the continuing growth of social media had been discussed, together with the difficulties that presents for Councillors knowing how and when to engage, and ensuring that their contributions are compliant with the Media Guidelines for Councillors and the Members Code of Conduct. It was noted that the Media Guidelines had been updated after the last meeting, with a specific requirements to comply with those Guidelines included in the Members Code of Conduct. This had reinforced that the Code applied to Councillors when using Social Media, and that Councillors were strongly advised not to use pseudonyms when using social media, although it was recognised that this was more difficult to track.

The Chief Executive and Leader confirmed that they considered the relationships and interactions between Officers and Members to be good and respectful, with the appropriate level of challenge. In a similar way, Member to Member interactions were generally good, even when robust in a political context, but the exchanges were generally respectful and self-regulating. It was recognised that the Group Leaders had a key role to play in asking their Councillors to make sure that political attacks were directed at policy and not personal.

The Chief Executive and Leader praised the excellent work carried out by the

Monitoring Officer during the last year, in his robust professionalism in dealing with difficult and complex situations.

A question was asked about the Leader and Chief Executive's view on how the Council was perceived, which had implications for an assessment of its governance, and the role of consultation in setting that view. In response, it was stated that it was important to be prepared to listen to different views from local people and the community. It was recognised that there was a sometimes a perception that the Council did not listen to the results of consultation. The Leader and Chief Executive were of the view that the Council did listen, but it was not always possible to please everyone, when balancing the views of some against the general need.

It was agreed that there could be improvements in distinguishing between different types of consultation, so that it was clear what was being asked, and what options were available. The Leader advised that the 'Big Conversation' initiative was intended to bring about a different form of engagement, but that this was different to formal statutory consultations on proposals, such as on the Local Plan. The Chief Executive suggested that he report back to the Committee at a future meeting on how the Council was continuing to develop its engagement with local people and communities.

Resolved -

- 1) That the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive be thanked for attending the Committee and answering the questions of the Committee.
- 2) That the Chief Executive report back to a future meeting of the Committee on how the Council was continuing to develop its engagement with local people and communities.