

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**MONDAY, 27 JANUARY 2014**

**PRESENT:-** Councillor David Wood (Chair), Councillors Michael Bray, Toby Elliott (Deputy), Brian Ford, Fay Howard and Teresa Page, Mr Trevor Davies, Mr David Dawson, Mr Mike Compton and Mr Richard Hailstone (Co-opted Representatives) and Mr Paul Morris and MR Peter Morgans (Independent Persons).

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Roderick Bluh.

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

Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, and Gavin Jones, the 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. In particular, the views of the Leader and the Chief Executive were sought regarding their experience of the effectiveness of the new ethical framework since its introduction from July 2012.

The Chief Executive commenced the discussion by placing the issue of ethical governance within an organisational and political context and a future of continuing anxiety and ambiguity due, in the main, to continuing austerity. He commented that the staff resource had been reduced at all levels whilst the level of demand for high quality service remained high and that, consequently, a programme of major organisational change had become essential to take the organisation forward in a way that would meet the specific objectives articulated in its Stronger Together vision.

As at his previous meetings with the Standards Committee, the Chief Executive commented on the relationships and interactions between members and officers, which he felt remained generally positive with a high degree of respect and professionalism and co-operation evident on both sides.

On the specific matter of the Council's processes for handling Code of Conduct complaints, the Chief Executive referred to the recently commissioned Independent Review of the Council's process for considering complaints of breaches of the Member Code of Conduct, to ensure that these remain valid and effective. The Chief Executive anticipated that the review, and the production by the commissioned body of a final report for consideration by the Standards Committee, would take in the region of 8 weeks.

Councillor David Renard commented that, in his time on the Council, and particularly during his time as Leader of the Council, there had been a significant shift in the Council's organisational structure to one that is "member-led". He felt that this was entirely proper, since the governing mandate was, appropriately, invested

in the Council's democratically appointed membership. He acknowledged the effect of improved cross-party working in ensuring that as many "democratically elected voices" as possible were heard as part of the decision making process and that, where possible within political affiliations, aims and objectives should be established on the basis of the collective viewpoint.

Councillor Renard recognised that members had to be firm and clear in communicating aims and objectives to officers, to provide a clear direction of travel, and agreed with the Chief Executive's sentiment that, generally, member and officer relationships were extremely good. He supported the proposed review of the Council's processes for handling complaints against elected members and emphasised the timeliness of the process, that it was in all parties' best interests to ensure that complaints were resolved at the earliest opportunity.

Following their opening remarks, the Leader and Chief Executive responded to members questions on the following issues:

- the terms of reference for the standards reviews and the opportunity for officer input as part of the review process
- the impact of group politics on prioritisation and the Council's decision making process
- the consultation to be undertaken in support of the current review and, in particular, the decision to extend the public consultation beyond the lay representation on the Standards Committee
- inclusiveness and the effectiveness of public consultation as an influencing factor in the Council's decision making process
- the role of the Independent Persons and their statutory non-voting status at the Standards Committee

Resolved – That Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, and the 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.