

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 3 FEBRUARY 2015

PRESENT:- Councillors David Wood, Michael Bray (Vice-Chair), Fay Howard, Kevin Parry, Eric Shaw, Carol Shelley, Vera Tomlinson and Joe Tray. Messrs Keith Strickland, Paul Morris, Trevor Davies, Richard Hailstone and Mike Compton.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kevin Small and Mr David Dawson.

Councillor David Renard, Leader of the Council, and Gavin Jones, Chief Executive, were in attendance.

### 16. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded members of the need to declare known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. Councillor Joe Tray made a non-prejudicial declaration of interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 8 ("Review of Codes and Protocols"), in respect of his capacity as Local Authority appointed representative on the Fire Authority.

### 17. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2014 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

### 18. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

### 19. 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 to in the item listed below on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the respective paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

<u>Item No.</u>	<u>Paragraph Nos.</u>	<u>Minute No.</u>
7	1 and 2	15

### 20. Question and Answer Session - Leader of the Council and Chief Executive

Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, and Gavin Jones, 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.

The Leader referred to specific matters raised during the course of the previous question and answer session, as recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2014, and confirmed that these had been addressed, where necessary, via amendments to the Council's Constitution and/or its Standards arrangements. It was his view that Council's new ethical framework had become firmly embedded in the organisation, since its introduction from July 2012, and was proving very effective.

The Chief Executive commented that the Council continued to have to contend with the implications of the combined pressures of continuing austerity and reduced financial resources, perhaps, unfortunately, for some time to come. However, he was pleased to report that, whilst the pressure on the organisation continued, and there existed the potential for organisational and relationship stress as a consequence of that pressure, there had been few, if any, significant manifestations of problems in terms of strained member/officer relationships and/or inappropriate behaviours. He advised that, since the last question and answer session with the Standards Committee, the Monitoring Officer had joined Corporate Board, and that his expertise was extremely valuable to the operation of that senior officer forum, particularly in the context of matters of ethical governance and corporate behaviours.

The Chief Executive commented on the Council's Organisational strategy, particularly in relation to expected officer behaviours and values, as articulated through the "Stronger Together" organisational vision and feeding through the appraisal and performance management systems. He was pleased with how this strategy had been adopted across the Corporate Council whilst recognising that, as with any organisational strategy, there remained room for improvement. Overall, he felt the Council had established a strong set of organisational values against which it might be held to account and that the strategy was working very well.

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

- The continuing demand on services and pressure on staff resources and the recognition and management of stress in the workplace environment.
- The success of the Council's Localities function in working alongside Ward Members to engage with local people and communities to resolve community based problems and influence corporate policies.
- The necessary contraction of service provision in response to on-going resource pressures and the management of community and individual service expectations.

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.

## **21. Ethical Framework Update**

The Committee received a report from the Director of Law and Democratic Services providing an update on matters relating to the Ethical Framework, including:

- Dispensations.
- A summary of Code of Conduct complaints received during the 2014/15 Municipal Year.

- Training.

A member asked as to whether a sufficient number of members had received Licensing training to ensure there is an adequate membership “pool” to be drawn upon for Licensing Panels and the Monitoring Officer agreed to report back on this issue to the next meeting.

Resolved – (1) That the Ethical Framework update be noted.

(2) That, with reference to the summary of Code of Conduct complaints, and where a complaint is made by a Borough Councillor against a fellow Councillor, the Monitoring Officer be asked to consider the appropriateness and benefit of amending the current arrangements to facilitate formal consultation with the Political Group Leaders and the Councillors concerned, to establish if an informal resolution might be achieved, and that this be considered further at the next meeting.

## **22. Review of Codes and Protocols**

Further to Minute 14(3) and (4), the Committee received a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services inviting members to review the following Codes and Protocols, in the light of submissions for amendment put forward following consultation with members of the Committee, relevant officers and Parish Councils, and to determine whether any changes should be made.

- Members’ Code of Conduct.
- Officers’ Code of Conduct.
- Monitoring Officer Protocol.
- Councillor Role Definitions.
- Guidance to Councillors on dealings with the media.
- Protocol of Member/Officer Relationships.
- Local Code of Governance.
- Members Planning Code of Good Practice.
- Public Question Time at Council Meetings.
- Recording, Photography and use of social media.

Resolved – (1) That the Monitoring Officer be authorised to amend and re-issue the Codes and Protocols documentation in accordance with the viewpoints endorsed by the Committee during the course of its debate of this item.

(2) That, with regard to members’ concerns about the potential for abuse of departmental “working from home” guidelines, the Head of People and Development be invited to attend the next meeting to discuss this matter and the need for standardisation of “working from home” practices across the Council.

(3) That, with regard to the protocol and guidance for Public Question Time at Council meetings, the Committee and Member Services Manager be advised of members’ position that the standard of sound equipment available in the Council Chamber should be properly maintained and fit for purpose.

## **23. Ethical Compliance Report**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services regarding the outcome of various ethical framework compliance matters, including the details of Whistleblowing cases and Code of Conduct Complaints received since the last Committee and the outcome of any completed investigations in relation to these.

Resolved – That the Ethical Framework Compliance report be noted.