



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a MEETING held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE on THURSDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2004.

PRESENT: Mr RL Tickell (Chairman), Mr PCB Coleman, Mr A Gooch, Mr PJ McGuigan, Mrs P Rugg and Mr G Thompson.

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1. **Membership** The Director of Corporate Services reported the membership of the Committee.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Resolved: To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2003.

3. **Chairman's Announcements**

- (a) **Appointment of Independent Member**

The Chairman reported that arrangements were in place for the appointment of an independent member to replace Mr G Thompson. An advertisement would be placed in at least one local newspaper at the end of February or beginning of March. Interviews would take place in April and the appointment would be formally agreed at the Annual Council meeting in May. The interview panel would consist of the Chairman of the Standards Committee, a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Dr Joe Sang from the Wiltshire Racial Equality Council as the independent person.

- (b) **Review Panel**

The Chairman reported that a contentious review panel hearing had taken place in December. A report on this particular panel hearing and the lessons learned from it would be brought to the next meeting.

4. **Audit Commission: Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2003**

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive which invited members to respond to the Audit Commission's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter. The District Auditor reported that the following 3 main areas had been considered in preparing the report:

- Performance Issues
- Accounts

- Financial Aspects of Corporate Governance

It was noted a number of improvements had taken place over the last year and that the Council had introduced an extensive change programme to address recent challenges. On the whole the Audit Commission felt that all necessary systems were in place and were working. However, it had been necessary to issue a statutory recommendation with regard to improving performance data.

Members of the Standards Committee made the following comments and observations:

- Members were pleased that the Auditor had been supportive of the complaints system that had been introduced over the last year.
- It was noted that the Council could reapply for a new Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) to take place later this year. The services score had improved and the Council was already working towards overall improvement.
- Some concern was expressed that this was the third statutory recommendation in consecutive years but the District Auditor confirmed that he was satisfied the Council was addressing this. It was also noted that the recommendation did not relate to the same issues each year.
- In spite of the good overall comments members were disappointed to see that there were 2 'reserved' performance indicators.

The Chief Executive explained that the Council was working hard to address the issues raised by the Auditor and by the CPA assessment. The following work was currently being undertaken:

- Goals had been set to ensure that 80% of people contacting the Council were dealt with at their first point of contact and were able to access services within a 5-mile radius of their homes.
- A performance management project had been put in place to ensure that service plans also focussed on management issues and Council's priorities.
- The Council had adopted a medium term financial plan and a risk management strategy.
- A "Valuing People" project had been set up and an annual staff survey was being carried out. There was also a staff magazine, a team brief and a revised induction process.

Resolved:

- (1) *To note the report.*
- (2) *To request an update in July on those issues raised in the annual auditor's letter that fell within the remit of the Standards Committee.*

5. **Internal Audit Section 2003-04 – Progress Report**

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Auditor which set out overall progress against the Audit Plan 2003-04 and developments planned for 2004/05. The Chief Auditor reported that although there had been a need for internet investigations to take place this was not a serious problem within the Council. Members were reassured that monitoring systems were in place and that appropriate action was being taken. The Committee also noted that more work was required on risk management issues. In 2004/05 a new Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government would come into effect. This could provide the Audit Section with an opportunity to develop a wider audit role in relation to reviewing new corporate and operational risk areas, in addition to financial risks.

It was suggested that the summary of audit findings to date along with any outstanding audit recommendations which had not yet been implemented should be brought to the attention of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

Resolved:

- (1) *To note the report.*
- (2) *To ask the Chief Auditor to include in his annual report details of any audit recommendations which have not yet been implemented and of the council department concerned.*

6. **Corporate Governance**

The Committee considered a report by the Monitoring Officer which gave details of the Council's progress on ethical governance issues.

Resolved:

- (1) *To receive a report on implementation of risk management procedures from the Chief Auditor in September 2004.*
- (2) *To receive a draft of the Local Code of Governance in September 2004.*

(Duration of meeting: 3.00pm – 4.40pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Marie Todd, Democratic and Members' Services, direct line (01225) 713011 or e-mail marietodd@wiltshire.gov.uk
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