

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a MEETING of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE on THURSDAY 14 APRIL 2005.

PRESENT:

Mr R Tickell (Chairman), Mr G Gooch, Mr P McGuigan, Mrs P Rugg and Ms C O'Sullivan.

16. **Apologies** Apologies for absence were received from Mr P Coleman.

17. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Resolved: To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2005.

18. **Chairman's Announcements** The Chairman made the following announcements:-

(a) Appointment of New Member

The Chairman announced that this was his last meeting as he would be retiring from the Committee at the end of April. Mr Paul Lefever had been appointed as the new independent member on the Committee subject to approval at the Annual Council meeting on 17 May 2005. Mr McGuigan explained that 12 applications had been received for this position and that four people had been interviewed.

(b) Independent Forum Meeting – 22 April 2005

The Chairman confirmed that the above meeting would be taking place at County Hall and that about 24 independent members from various local authorities in Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Wiltshire would be attending. Peter McGuigan would be chairing this meeting, as the Chairman would be on holiday.

(c) Nina Wilton – Secondment

The Chairman informed members that Nina Wilton, Corporate Standards Manager, was currently on secondment with the

Standards Board for England. Sarah Butler would be covering for Nina in her absence.

19. Amendments to the Constitution

The Committee received a report by the Monitoring Officer which asked members to consider making some amendments to the Constitution to deal with certain anomalies which had been identified, to improve its effectiveness and to ensure that it reflected recent changes in legislation.

Resolved: To recommend the County Council to approve the amendments to the Constitution as set out in Appendix 1 of the report subject to the following amendments:

- (a) *Part 4 – Members’ Questions – amend paragraph 2 to read:*

“Notice of questions on matters which are not included in a report to the Council must be given in writing to the Deputy Chief Executive not later than two clear working days before the Council meeting.”

- (b) *Part 5 – Confidential and Exempt information – amend first paragraph to read:*

“Where a meeting of the Standards Committee or its sub-committee is convened to consider a matter referred for investigation by the Standards Board for England the above 15 categories shall apply with the addition of the following:”

20. Standards Board Consultation on Members’ Code of Conduct

The Committee noted that the consultation paper on the Code of Conduct presented an important opportunity to make comments on proposed changes and to highlight any current problems with the code. For example the current Code of Conduct had caused some difficulties for members who had been elected on a single topic who then found themselves unable to speak on the matter due to their having a prejudicial interest. There could also be difficult issues concerning potential conflicts of interest for representatives on outside bodies or for those Councillors who were members of more than one local authority.

Members felt that they should discuss this matter in more detail at the next meeting on 9 June and agreed that it would be helpful to invite any elected members who wished to attend to feed in their views on the consultation paper.

Resolved:

- (1) *To hold a workshop at the next meeting of the Standards Committee on the Standards Board Consultation on the Members’ Code of Conduct.*
- (2) *To agree that the next meeting should commence at 1pm and to invite members of the Council to attend the workshop to feed in their views on the consultation paper.*

21. Audit on Ethical Governance

The Committee noted that the Audit Commission was currently undertaking an audit on ethical governance within the County Council. As part of the audit Members and senior officers had been asked to complete a questionnaire. The auditors were disappointed with the response so far and the Monitoring Officer agreed to send a reminder to members asking them to complete the questionnaire. It was hoped that the Audit Commission would be in a position to report the outcome of the survey at the next meeting of the Committee.

22. Mr Richard Tickell

The Chairman thanked the members of the Committee for all their help and support over the last four years. He also thanked all the officers, particularly Stephen Gerrard, Ian Gibbons, Nina Wilton, and Marie Todd, who had given him so much help.

Mrs Rugg, on behalf of the elected members, Mr McGuigan, on behalf of the independent members and Mr Gerrard, on behalf of the officers paid tribute to Mr Tickell and thanked him for his work over the years. They thanked him for his fairness, leadership and conciliation skills and for the way that he had given such impetus to the Committee since its inception. Everyone wished Mr Tickell a long and happy retirement.

(Duration of meeting: 3pm – 3.45pm)

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