

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a MEETING of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE on WEDNESDAY 25 JANUARY 2006.

PRESENT:

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

1. **Apologies** Apologies for absence were received from Mr P Lefever.
2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Resolved: To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2005.

3. **Chairman's Announcements**

- (a) New Appointment to the Standards Committee

The Chairman reported that Gus Gooch would be retiring from the Standards Committee at the end of April and that officers would be making arrangements to appoint a new member of the Committee.

- (b) Standards in Local Government

The Chairman informed members that a report would be submitted to the next meeting on the ODPM document entitled Standards in English Local Government – The Future. A copy of the document had been circulated to members for information.

- (c) CPA Inspection

The Chairman informed members that, following a recent inspection, Wiltshire County Council had been awarded three stars and was judged to be a strongly improving Council.

4. **Audit Commission: Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2004-05**
The Committee considered the Audit Commission's Annual Audit and

Inspection Letter for 2004-05. Dr Keith Robinson, Chief Executive, attended the meeting for this item. He explained that last year's letter had highlighted some inaccuracies in the Council's performance indicators and was happy to report that this year no such inaccuracies had been identified. The Council was pleased to have been awarded three stars in its recent CPA inspection and had received the highest grading for improvement. It was hoped that the improvement in performance would continue and the Council aimed to focus particularly on its use of resources over the forthcoming year.

Members asked various questions about the audit letter and discussed the following issues arising from it:

- The need to increase efficiency savings in the light of the disappointing grant settlement this year.
- The customer satisfaction survey.
- Equality and Diversity - members noted that further work had to be undertaken to improve the Council's performance in this area. Greater consistency was required among the different services. The Committee asked the Corporate Standards Manager to bring a report to a future meeting setting out the issues which needed to be addressed and the proposed action to be taken to improve equality and diversity within the Council.
- The work of the Customer Care Unit and the BPR Improvement Programme.
- Partnership working – it was noted that this was a growing area of work.
- Internal Audit and Ethical Governance – it was noted that the Audit Commission was currently undertaking a survey across the Council to ascertain the effectiveness of internal controls and risk management within the Council. The results of this survey would be available in time for the next meeting in April and it was agreed that group leaders would be invited to attend the presentation by the Audit Commission at this meeting.

***Resolved:** To note the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and to congratulate the County Council on a very positive report this year.*

5. **Whistle Blowing and Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policies – Progress Report and Implementation Plan** The Committee considered a report by the Monitoring Officer. The report outlined the programme of work to be undertaken to strengthen the Council's whistle blowing and anti-fraud and corruption policies and procedures. The implementation plan was currently progressing in line with the timetable set out in appendix 1 of the report. General trends and

statistics relating to whistle blowing would be submitted regularly to the Standards Committee.

***Resolved:** To note the contents of the report and to receive a progress report at the December 2006 meeting.*

6. **Revision of Procedure for Determination of Complaints Referred by the Ethical Standards Officer** The Committee considered a report by the Monitoring Officer. The report asked members to approve amendments to the Procedure for Determination of Complaints referred by the Ethical Standards Officer to reflect changes resulting from the Local Authorities (Code of Conduct) (Local Determination) (Amendment) Regulations 2004.

***Resolved:** To approve the proposed revisions to the Procedure as set out in the Appendix to the report subject to the following amendments:*

- (a) *In paragraph 9.11 it should be made clear that there is only provision to make one request to the Ethical Standards Officer that the matter is referred back to the Standards Board for consideration.*
- (b) *In paragraph 10.4, bullet point 4, the position regarding apologies and length of suspension should be clarified.*

7. **Digest of Adjudication Panel Cases** The Committee considered a report by the Monitoring Officer. The report updated members on recent cases considered by the Adjudication Panel for England. Members noted that some of the sanctions imposed by the Adjudication Panels appeared to be inconsistent.

8. **Annual Report** The Committee discussed the production of an annual report and decided that a report should be produced by the Annual meeting of the Council in May. It was agreed that the report should be published on the Council's intranet site this year rather than producing printed copies.

***Resolved:** To consider a draft copy of the Annual Report at the next meeting.*

(Duration of meeting: 2.30pm – 3.35pm)

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