

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a MEETING of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE on WEDNESDAY 4 OCTOBER 2006.

PRESENT:

Mr P McGuigan (Chairman), Mr M Hewson, Mr P Lefever, Ms C O'Sullivan, Mrs P Rugg and Mr K Shipman.

30. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Resolved: To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2006.

31. **Chairman's Announcements**

Meeting Dates The Chairman informed members of the following meeting/seminar dates:

- Ethical Governance Seminar – 13 October 2006
- Annual Standards Board for England Conference – 16/17 October 2006
- Independent Members Forum – 27 October 2006
- Ombudsman Seminar – 3 November 2006 (NB this seminar has since been postponed).

32. **Use of Resources – Ethical Governance Component Submission to the Audit Commission** The Committee considered a matrix produced by the Corporate Standards Manager which set out the ethical governance submission to the Audit Commission.

The Committee noted that the items that had been given red or amber status were now being addressed. Members were informed that the Council still needed to improve its performance on equality and diversity.

It was suggested that the ten Principles of Public Life arising from the Nolan Report should be included within the Members' Code of Conduct. It was noted that a report asking members to reconsider

placing the Register of Members' Interests on the Council website was likely to be considered by the Cabinet in the near future.

Resolved: To note the report.

33. **Ethical Governance Improvement Programme** The Committee considered a report by the Monitoring Officer. The report outlined progress on the Council's ethical governance improvement programme.

It was noted that paragraphs 8 to 14 of the report should be deleted as they had been copied from a previous paper.

Resolved: To note the report and to receive a further update on this programme at a future meeting.

34. **Complaints and Access to Information BPR** The Corporate Standards Manager reported that this project had not progressed very far since the last meeting, mainly due to a key member of staff being on maternity leave.

Resolved: To receive a progress report on this matter at the next meeting.

35. **Whistleblowing Arrangements – Progress Report** The Committee considered a report by the Monitoring Officer. The report provided members with information about the implementation of the Council's new whistleblowing arrangements.

Members were pleased to note that the new procedure had gone live in June 2006 and appeared to be working well.

Resolved:

(1) *To note the report.*

(2) *To receive an annual report on the operation of the Council's whistleblowing arrangements.*

36. **Governance and Reporting Arrangements** The Committee considered a report by the Monitoring Officer. The report set out proposals for new governance and reporting arrangements for the Council. It was noted that the Final Accounts and Audit Committee had agreed the recommendations at its meeting on 29 September 2006.

Officers explained that the appendix attached to the report was intended to be a working document which would be reviewed on a regular basis.

On discussing this document members made the following comments on the arrangements:

- The Standards Committee should be listed as a stakeholder under equality and diversity and the annual audit and inspection letter.
- Could the governance areas be grouped in a more helpful way?
- Who is the final arbiter in each of these arrangements?
- Members felt that some parts of the document required further clarification.

Resolved: To take the Committee's comments into consideration as part of the review of the document and to bring a further report to the Committee following the review.

37. **Statement on Internal Control in Local Government 2005/06** The Committee considered a report by the Monitoring Officer. The report gave details of the final version of the Statement on Internal Control in Local Government which had been approved by the Final Accounts and Audit Committee. It was noted that the statement would be published with the Statement of Accounts.

Resolved: To note the report.

38. **Amendments to the Constitution** Members considered some proposed amendments to the Constitution and noted that the Cabinet Advisory Panels had now been disbanded. The Committee had a longstanding interest in the role of "backbench members" and stressed that they wished to continue to monitor the opportunities for these members to contribute to and engage in the democratic process.

Resolved: To recommend the County Council to agree:

- (1) *To make the necessary consequential amendments to the Constitution resulting from the restructuring of the County Council Departments agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 25 July 2006.*
- (2) *To remove all references to Cabinet Advisory Panels from the Constitution as a result of the introduction of more efficient working arrangements.*
- (3) *To amend Part 3B of the Constitution to reflect the changes to Cabinet Portfolios reported by the Leader to the County Council in May.*

39. **Proposed Work Programme for 2007** The Committee considered a report by the Monitoring Officer which set out a work programme for the forthcoming year. It was noted that the programme would be subject to review and would be updated as necessary.

Resolved: To approve the work programme and meeting dates for the forthcoming year attached as an appendix to the report subject to the inclusion of an annual report on whistleblowing.

40. **Exclusion of the Public**

Resolved: In accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the public from the meeting for the business specified in Minute Number 41 because it is likely that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act and the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

41. **Corporate Complaint – Review Panel Findings** The Committee considered a report by the Monitoring Officer which advised members about a complaint considered by a Review Panel under the corporate complaints procedure. Members noted that the majority of the Panel's recommendations had been now implemented and that the procedural recommendations were being progressed.

Resolved: To note the report.

(Duration of meeting: 2.30pm – 4.15pm)

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