WILTSHIRE COUNCIL   **AGENDA ITEM NO. 8**

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
13 January 2010

Communications and Training Sub-Committees

Purpose of Report

1.   To propose new arrangements for the discharge and oversight of the
        communications and training functions of the Standards Committee.

Background

2.   The Standards Committee has a statutory responsibility for training councillors, both
        at unitary and parish level, in the requirements of the Code of Conduct. It also has a
        responsibility, under Wiltshire Council's Constitution, for the promotion of high
        standards of conduct throughout the authority.

3.   In anticipation of an increased need for communication about standards matters after
        Wiltshire became a unitary authority the Standards Committee of Wiltshire County
        Council, at its last meeting in March 2009, agreed to establish a Communications
        Sub-Committee with the following remit:

        "To recommend to the Standards Committee measures to:

        publicise, promote and raise awareness of the work of the Standards Committee and;
        be proactive in promoting good behaviour by members of Wiltshire Council and town
        and parish councils within the Council's jurisdiction".

4.   The Communications Sub-Committee has since then met on a number of occasions,
        and undertaken what was, essentially, project work, including the development and
        dissemination of an comprehensive introduction pack to all of the parish councils in
        Wiltshire and the development and publication of a leaflet outlining the requirements
        of the Code. The Communications Sub-Committee has also developed an action
        plan and a communications strategy. These included a number of activities that
        related to training.

5.   The Standards Committee agreed to establish a Training Sub-Committee at its
        meeting on 9th September 2009. The terms of reference of the Training Sub-
        Committee were:

        "To co-ordinate and oversee the training function of the Standards Committee.

        The remit of the training sub-committee should encompass the Standards
        Committee's wider remit to promote high standards conduct, this should specifically
        include arrangements for training officers on the Officers' Code of Conduct."

6.   It became evident after the first meeting of the Training Sub-Committee that the Sub-Committee's terms of reference were too loose to be assist members of the sub-committee to establish a work plan. It was noted that there was considerable duplication between the forward work plan adopted by the Communications Sub-Committee and the remit of the Training Sub-Committee, which is to co-ordinate and oversee the training function of the Standards Committee. This, coupled with the fact that reports have to go to the Standards Committee for ratification after presentation to the sub-committees, was resulting in a considerable extra burden of work for officers supporting those committees.

7.   Officers also noted that the arrangements for training officers do not fall within the remit of the Standards Committee, since that is a function of the Human Resources department, which has a training strategy that includes all aspects of officer training – the strategy is one that has been adopted by the authority as a whole, and arrangements for delivering training on the Officers' Code of Conduct must, therefore, fall within the overarching training strategy for officers. The Head of Governance asked members of the Training Sub-Committee to note that she would bring reports on implementation to the Standards Committee to be noted, but that content and arrangements for implementation lay outside the remit of the Standards Committee.

8.   These issues were discussed at the meetings of the Communications Sub-Committee on the 7th December 2009 and the Training Sub-Committee on the 14th December 2009. The Chairs of the Standards Committee, the Communications Sub-Committee and the Training Sub-Committee asked the Head of Governance to bring this report to the Standards Committee following those discussions, with proposals based on the discussions with sub-committee members.

Proposals

9.   To disband the existing Communications and Training Sub-Committees and replace them with "task and finish" groups. These task and finish groups would be constituted to carry out particular tasks identified by the Standards Committee as and when a need is identified.

10.   Reports to the Standards Committee should contain a paragraph that considers whether the report contains issues giving rise to a training or communications need. If so, the Standards Committee would establish an ad hoc task and finish group to deliver the specific piece of work identified. The task and finish group would only exist until the project had been completed.

11.   Membership of task and finish groups would be not be fixed. Members would be drawn from the Standards Committee, with officer support, as the need arises. Consideration would be given to the skills needed for each task, and to the availability of members. This arrangement would provide for greater flexibility, would enable the Standards Committee to capitalise on the very wide range of skills in its membership, and give all members of the Committee the opportunity to engage in project work.

12.   The Standards Committee will need to ensure continuity in the link between the Standards Committee and the Member Development Group. This link ensures that the training needs of councillors in relation to the Code of Conduct and other matters within the Standards Committee's remit are taken into account as part of the overall

member development strategy, which is within the remit of the Member Development Group. The link is currently provided by Councillor Carter, who is an elected member of Wiltshire Council who sits on both the Training Sub-Committee and the Member Development Group. It is therefore proposed that Councillor Carter remains the Standards Committee's link to the Member Development Group. The Standards Committee may wish officers to explore how this link can be maintained in the long term, to ensure that there is always Standards Committee representation on the Member Development Group, notwithstanding the fact that individual councillors will change.

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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report: None