

Standards Committee

A meeting of Standards Committee was held on Thursday, 18th October, 2007.

Present: Mr F W Hayes (Chairman), Cllr Paul Baker, Cllr John Fletcher, Mr L W Hedley (Parish Representative), Mr T Bowman (Parish Representative), Mrs E Chapman (Independent), Mrs F Robinson (Independent)

Officers: C Andrew (Audit Commission); D Bond, S Johnson (LD)

Also in attendance: No other persons in attendance

Apologies: Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Mohammed Javed, Cllr Andrew Sherris

S Declarations of Interest

51/07

There were no declarations of interest.

S Audit Commission Annual Governance Report 2006/07

52/07

The Chairman welcomed Cath Andrew (Audit Manager), from the Audit Commission, who was in attendance to present the Commission's Annual Governance report to the Committee.

The Committee was informed that the Audit Commission was statutorily required to issue the report to those charged with governance which in Stockton's case was the Audit Committee. The report was presented to the Standards Committee for information.

The report was required in order to bring to the attention of the Audit Committee any issues relating to fraud, inconsistency with financial statement and non compliance with legislative or regulatory requirements. The report also dealt with any concerns relating to independence and objectivity.

It was explained that work on the financial statements and the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness had been completed. The Commission had issued an unqualified audit opinion and conclusion and the draft auditor's report, reflecting this, was provided to members. However, it was explained that a notice of objection to the accounts had been received and, until this was resolved, the District Auditor was unable to certify that he had completed his work. The Audit Manager explained that the Audit Commission was satisfied that the objection would not have a material effect on the financial statements.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

S The Code Uncovered - DVD

53/07

Members of the Committee were shown a DVD produced by the Standards Board for England which used a fictional planning application dispute to illustrate the key changes to the revised Model Code of Conduct.

The DVD examined the rules about declaring interests, disclosing confidential information and bullying.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The information be noted.
2. The presentation be repeated for those Committee Members not in attendance.

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54/07 **Members' and Officers' Gifts and Hospitality**

Consideration was given to a report that provided details of the procedures relating to Members' and Officers' gifts and hospitality and the returns submitted during the second quarter of the year (1 July 2007 - 30 September 2007).

It was explained that the Members' Register had again been reviewed and Members of the Committee were provided with the details of gifts/hospitality received by Members in the second quarter of the year. There were 2 entries.

It was noted that a further review had been undertaken of the Officers' gifts and hospitality register. Members were provided with details submitted during the second quarter of the year.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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55/07 **Summary of Allegations of Misconduct Determined by the Standards Board for England and Cases Referred for Local Investigation**

Members considered a report that provided details of misconduct allegations regarding Members of Councils within the Stockton Borough area, which had been dealt with by the Standards Board and the Standards Committee during the first two quarters of 2007/08.

The Monitoring officer reported that during the period 1 April 2007 to 30 June 2007 allegations against five Members were determined by the Standards Board. None of these were referred for investigation. Details were provided to Members.

It was noted that no allegations were determined locally during the first quarter.

Members of the Committee were informed that during the period 1 July to 30 September 2007 allegations against a further four Members were determined by the Standards Board. None of these were referred for investigation. Details were provided to Members.

It was noted that no allegations were determined locally during the second quarter.

Members of the Committee were provided with details of allegations referred for local investigation, which were still outstanding. At the time of writing the report there was just one such allegation.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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56/07**

Comments, Commendations and Complaints - First Quarter of 2007/08

Consideration was given to a report that provided details of commendations and complaints received during the first quarter of 2007/08 (April to June 2007 inclusively).

During the first quarter of 2007/08 (April to June 2007 inclusively), the Authority received 173 complaints (compared to 190 in the same period in 2006/07) and 401 commendations (compared to 506 in the same period in 2006/07).

Members were informed that the breakdown of complaints received was DNS 31.8%, CESC 26.6%, Tristar 25.4%, Resources 7.5%, Tees Active 6.9%, PPC 1.2% and L&D 0.6%.

Members of the Committee were informed of the main areas of complaints and these were as follows:-

DNS - Direct Services - Street cleansing/refuse/recycling/ horticultural services/highways

CESC - Children & Adults Social Care/Children and Young Peoples services

Resources - Taxation - procedural problems

Tees Active - procedures

Tristar - repairs admin and procedures

Members of the Committee were informed that of the 173 complaints in the first quarter, 171 were stage 1/2 complaints and 151 were responded to within timescales. Delays in responses were due to a number of factors such as complainants' delay, or failure of complainants to attend meetings to discuss their complaints, complainants changing their minds about a complaint, but failing to notify the authority. It was noted that all service areas had made exceptional attempts to respond to complaints within timescales, but often due to the complexity of a complaint, this was not always possible.

The Committee was advised that within Tristar Homes, complaints were dealt with immediately. A weekly analysis was undertaken by the customer services team. Any recurring issues or trends were picked up immediately and forwarded to the relevant manager. Overall there had been a large decrease in complaints - 44 for the second quarter down from 71 in the previous quarter. All complaints were investigated according to the company's procedures, and managers made aware of issues raised.

It was indicated that of the 401 commendations received in the first quarter, 193 were in relation to road safety team/training event. 81 out of the total of 124 for CESC were in relation to Children's and Adults' Social Care Services. Of these 81 commendations, the number of commendations received for Adults Services for the second quarter rose to 55 (in the whole of 2006/07 there were 108 commendations recorded for Adults' Services). It was noted that the increase

appeared to relate to the Intermediate Care Services within Adults' Services. The Council's Customer Care team were currently seeking to identify reasons for it and were continuing to monitor the area to see if further trends/patterns arose.

Details of commendations in other service areas included:- 75 regarding Direct Services, including street cleaning, refuse collection, recycling, horticultural services and highways; 43 regarding community protection (in particular consumer advice and Trading Standards enforcement) and 58 for Tristar Homes, mainly "thank you's" to individual members of staff.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

S 57/07 Observing Council Meetings

It was agreed as part of the Ethical Governance Light Touch Health Check Action Plan that Members of the Standards Committee would observe standards of conduct at full Council and other meetings such as Planning Committee meetings, with a view to reporting back to the next following Standards Committee meeting on what they had witnessed.

Members of the Standards Committee presented and discussed the feedback from the meetings of Council, Licensing Committee and Planning Committee that they had attended in September and October. Copies of the assessment sheets completed as a result of attendance at the meetings were circulated.

The Committee agreed that the Monitoring Officer should provide a summary of the main points from each of the assessment sheets to the relevant Council Members and Officers concerned.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The report and feedback be noted.
2. The Monitoring Officer provide feedback to the relevant Council Members and Officers.

S 58/07 Attendance at Town/Parish Council Meetings

It was agreed as part of the Ethical Governance Light Touch Health Check Action Plan that Members of the Standards Committee would attend and observe Town/Parish Council meetings, with a view to reporting back to the next following Standards Committee meeting on what they had witnessed. It was noted that attending such meetings would, in particular, have the benefit of raising the Committee's and Committee Member's profile at a parish level, and also provide Committee Members with a greater awareness of, and insight into Town/Parish Councils and Councillors' work and vice versa.

Members of the Standards Committee presented and discussed the feedback from the meetings of Long Newton Parish Council, Maltby Parish Council, Castle Levington and Kirklevington Parish Council and Yarm Town Council that they had attended in September. Copies of the assessment sheets completed as a result of attendance at the meetings were circulated.

Those Members that had attended the Yarm Town Council meeting noted that the clerk was on holiday and considered that another visit to a future meeting at Yarm Town Council would be of benefit.

The Committee agreed that the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair, should arrange to provide a summary of the main points from each of the assessment sheets to the relevant Town/Parish Councils' Clerks.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The report and feedback be noted.
2. Arrangements be made for Members to attend a further meeting of Yarm Town Council.
3. The Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair, arrange to provide feedback to the relevant Town/Parish Councils' Clerks.

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59/07 **Information/Discussion Items**

The Committee received and considered the following information:-

1. The Model Code - Para 12(2) - ACSeS Note.
2. FOI - Law Society Gazette Article - IBA Solicitors.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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60/07 **Standards Committee Forward Plan 2006/08**

The Committee was provided with the Forward Plan for 2006/2008.

RESOLVED that the plan be noted.