

Standards Committee

A meeting of Standards Committee was held on Friday, 13th March, 2009.

Present: Mr. F.W. Hayes (Chairman), Mrs Chapman (Independent Representative), Cllr Paul Baker, Cllr Andrew Sherris, , Mr T. Bowman (Parish Representative)Cllr John Fletcher (Substitute Standards Committee Member) and R. Moseley(Substitute Parish Representative)

Officers: D. E. Bond, M Henderson and A. Squires (LD)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Lynne Apedaile, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Ken Dixon, Mr C.V. Algie (Parish Representative), Mrs F. Robinson (Independent Representative), Mr C. Nestor (Substitute Independent Representative)

S Declarations of Interest

126/08

Mr. Bowman declared a personal non prejudicial interest in item 11 document 5 entitled 'Review of Area Partnerships' as he served on the Eastern Area Partnership Board.

Mrs Chapman declared a personal non prejudicial interest in item 11 document 5 entitled 'Review of Area Partnerships' as she served on the Central Area Partnership Board.

S Minutes of the meeting held on 15th January 2009 and 12th February 2009.

127/08

Minutes of the Meetings held on 15th January 2009 and 12th February 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

S Consideration Sub Committee Minutes

128/08

Members received minutes of a meeting held on 12th February 2009.

S Observing Council Meetings

129/08

The Committee was informed that the the Housing and Community Safety Select Committee held on 12th February 2009 had been attended by a Standards Committee Observer.

Members considered an Assessment sheet, completed for the meeting, and noted the positive comments.

It was agreed that the meeting appeared to be operating appropriately. The Committee noted that this had previously been passed on to the relevant Chairman after the last meeting.

Members were asked to consider attending a meeting of the Planning Committee and it was explained that details of forthcoming meetings would be distributed to Members, together with details of Cabinet and Council meetings.

RESOLVED that:-

1. the information be noted and appropriate comments be passed on to the Committee Chairman.
2. That the dates of forthcoming meetings of the Planning Committee, Cabinet and Council be forwarded to Members of the Committee.

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130/08 **Standards Committee and Audit Committee Liaison**

The Committee considered a report that advised members of discussions and outcomes from a meeting between Audit Committee and Standards Committee chairs and vice chairs.

The meeting had been arranged in order to discuss issues surrounding areas of work currently considered by both committees. Copies of the minutes of the meeting and also of the previous meeting were attached, as was the Audit Committee's Work Programme.

Members discussed the issues that typically were reported to both Committees and agreed that current arrangements were appropriate.

The liaison meeting also considered the following matters:-

- The Audit and Standards Committee's involvement in Stockton Partnerships
- The Reporting of the Local Assessment Framework.
- Consultation on Codes of Conduct for Members and Employees.

It was agreed that the chairs and vice chairs of the committees should continue to meet twice a year to monitor dual reporting arrangements and discuss any other relevant issues affecting the committees' operation.

RESOLVED that:-

1. the outcomes of the meeting be noted
2. the current practice of reporting areas of joint responsibility to both committees continue.
3. the chairs and vice chairs of the Standards Committee and Audit Committee continue to meet on a six monthly basis.

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131/08 **Confidential Reporting Policy**

The Committee was provided with a report that provided a position statement regarding confidential reporting policy.

It was explained that the Confidential Reporting Policy was last considered by the Committee at its meeting on 20 September, 2007.

Members were reminded that the policy was available on the intranet as a stand alone document and was contained in the electronic version of the Handbook of Personnel Policies and Procedures and referred to in the Members' Handbook. It was also included in the Standards and Probity section of the Council's website.

All existing contractors on the Council's Contracts Register received a copy of the Policy and the invitation to tender form included the requirement to adopt it.

Confidential reporting arrangements for Community Schools had been agreed and disseminated. Reviews by Internal Audit ascertained if the arrangements had been put into place and publicised by individual schools. The same process applied in relation to other establishments eg Learning Disabilities.

Updated publicity materials, particularly for new starters had been produced by Human Resources, last year, and the Chief Internal Auditor produced updated details when revising the fraud and corruption strategy. The February edition of Keeping You in Touch included references to the Council's whistleblowing procedures.

Neither the nominated officers nor the Chief Internal Auditor had raised any concerns regarding the policy or the way in which it operated and was applied.

Members noted that the Policy would be changed to take account of the new arrangements for dealing with allegations of Member misconduct.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

S **Comments, Complaints and Commendations - Third Quarter - 2008/09**
132/08

Members were provided with details of complaints and commendations during the third quarter of the year.

Complaints - 196. This compared to a total of 242 complaints for the same period in 2007/08.

Commendations - 359. This compared to 434 commendations received in the same period for last year.

Members were provided with a breakdown of the three months figures by service area.

The key messages from the information supplied were provided to members.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

S **Local Assessment Case Studies**
133/08

Members were provided with a case study relating to a breach of the Code of Conduct for Members.

The Committee was provided with details of sanctions available and considered how it would sanction the member detailed in the case study. It was noted that a combination of sanctions could be imposed.

Members agreed that, when imposing a sanction it was important not only to consider the particular circumstances of the case but also to bear in mind that more severe cases may arise at a future time.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

S **Local Assessment Framework**

134/08

The Committee considered the following information regarding the Local Assessment Framework:-

1. Publicising the Code of Conduct complaints process - Noted that the complaints process was being widely publicised e.g in Libraries and other public buildings, the Council's web site and via Town and Parish Councils
2. Local Assessment training documentation - the Committee considered a document that was being developed and would be particularly helpful in the training of new members to the committee and for members and officers generally.
3. Assessment decisions - performance monitoring – Review Sub-Committee
4. Ethical Standards Clinic - Weightmans Newsletter - February 2009

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

S **Information/Discussion Items**

135/08

Members considered and discussed the following items;-

1. Bias – R (Ortona Limited) –v- Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
2. Standards Board for England Case Summaries.
3. Human Rights Update
4. Freedom of Information Update
5. Area Partnerships - Cabinet report
6. Law & Democracy SIP 2009/2010
7. Tees Valley Town and Parish Councils Ethical Governance Workshop - 8th May at the Education Centre, Norton

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

S Standards Committee Forward Plan 2008/2010
136/08

Consideration was given to the updated version of the Standards Committee Forward Plan 2008/2010.

RESOLVED that the Committee's Forward Plan be noted and received