

## Standards Committee

A meeting of Standards Committee was held on Friday, 16th July, 2010.

**Present:** Mr F W Hayes(Chairman), Mr M Armstrong(Vice-Chair), Cllr Cains(Vice Cllr Baker), Mrs E Chapman(Independent Member), Cllr Cockerill(Vice Cllr Sherris), Cllr Bill Noble, Mr C.V Algie(Parish Representative), Mr T Bowman(Parish Representative), Mr R. Mosley(Substitute Parish Representative), Mr C. Nestor(Substitute Independent Member)

**Officers:** A. Barber(RES), D.E Bond, A. Squires, K. Wannop(LD)

**Also in attendance:** None

**Apologies:** Cllr Paul Baker, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Andrew Sherris

### **S**      **Declarations of Interest**

**30/10**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **S**      **Minutes of the Meetings held on 23rd April 2010 and 21st May 2010.**

**31/10**

The minutes of the meetings held on 23rd April 2010 and 21st May 2010 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record with the minor amendment to the attendance on 23rd April 2010 as Cllr Cockerill was present.

### **S**      **Internal Audit Report**

**32/10**

The Committee considered a report advising Standards Committee Members of the work carried out by the Internal Audit Section in connection with one audit within the remit of the Committee during the quarter April - June 2010.

Members were reminded that Internal Audit was an independent appraisal function established by the Council to objectively examine, evaluate and report on the adequacy of internal controls. This role ensured that there was proper economic, efficient and effective use of resources. It also ensured that the Council had adequate accounting records and control systems.

The Senior Audit Manager presented the Committee with details of a planned audit relating to Declarations of Interest and Gifts and Hospitality, this was given full assurance.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

### **S**      **Observing Local Strategic Partnership Meetings**

**33/10**

The Committee considered a report that provided an opportunity for Members who had attended meetings of the Local Strategic Partnership ("LSP") as observers, to report back on what they had observed regarding conduct and procedures at the meetings.

Stockton Renaissance Partnership Board - 6th July 2010 - attended by Chris Nestor.

Members received and discussed the assessment sheet/comments from the

above meeting and agreed the appropriate feedback.

RESOLVED that

1. The information be received
2. Feedback, as discussed, be provided to the relevant Officers/Chair

**S**      **Members' and Officers' Interests**

**34/10**

The Committee received a report that provided details of Members' and Officers' interests for the quarter April 2010 - June 2010.

Reminders about updating interests on the Member's register continued to be circulated. The most recent reminder was sent on 13 April 2010. An inspection of the register took place on 16 June. The reminders also covered co-optees and their details on the register. The inspection revealed that revised details continued to be received on a regular basis. Advice about interests continued to be provided before Cabinet and Council meetings and on an ad hoc basis when required. Advice provided for recent meetings and examples of recent declarations was provided. Advice had been and would continue to be provided to Members for the purposes of their roles on outside organisations.

A (Monitoring Officer) register inspection of the Officers register took place on 16 June 2010. Details of actions arising were provided. Officers were last asked to review and update their register details on 1 July 2010.

Updates to Town/Parish Council registers were received fairly regularly and advice about declarations of interest continued to be provided to Town/Parish Council Clerks when requested or considered necessary. A reminder to Town/Parish Clerks about ensuring that their councillors continued to update their register details was sent on 13 April 2010.

Work had continued to be undertaken with relevant Officers to ensure that registration and declaration of interests becomes more embedded in the governance arrangements of partnerships, Renaissance and TVU. Further examples of the guidance being provided were included. This incorporated a code of conduct refresh which took place at the Central Area Partnership Board. Feedback regarding how well the new arrangements were bedding in and how effective the guidance was perceived continued to be positive.

A recent audit of the procedures relating to registration and declaration of interests and gifts and hospitality resulted in a full assurance judgement – there being considered to be a sound system of control being applied consistently. It was also agreed that quarterly reminders would be placed in KYIT regarding the need to register/declare interests and gifts and hospitality. This was being done.

It was requested that officer time spent on declarations of interest could be recorded for the next quarter for the Committee to look at.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

**S**      **Members and Officer's Gifts and Hospitality**

**35/10**

Members considered a report that provided details of procedures and returns received during the first quarter of the year April 2010 - June 2010.

The Members' Register had again been reviewed (16 June 2010). There were two recorded examples of gifts/hospitality received by Members in the first quarter of the year. Details were provided. Members were last asked to update their register details on 13 April 2010. Advice had been and would continue to be provided to Members regarding their roles on other organisations. This took the form of information provided generally to all Members or one to one advice or advice to two or more Members. It covered all relevant standards and probity matters.

A further review had been undertaken of the Officers' gifts and hospitality register. There were no comments on the register. There were no entries for gifts/hospitality received for the period 1 April to 16 June 2010. Officers were last reminded about updating their register details on 1 July 2010.

Town/Parish Councils were last asked to ensure that their Councillors provided details of any gifts or hospitality offered/received on 13 April 2010. No returns had been highlighted.

Work had been undertaken with Officers to ensure that all relevant standards and probity arrangements become more embedded in the governance arrangements of partnerships, Renaissance and TVU. This included gifts and hospitality returns.

A recent audit of the procedures relating to registration and declaration of interests and gifts and hospitality resulted in a full assurance judgement – there being considered to be a sound system of control being applied consistently. It was also agreed that quarterly reminders would be placed in KYIT regarding the need to register/declare interests and gifts and hospitality. This had happened.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

## **S 36/10**      **Misconduct Allegations Update**

Members considered a report which provided an update regarding misconduct allegations received by the Authority.

### **Complaints Determined**

The last report regarding complaints was considered by the Committee at its meeting on 12 March 2010.

The report indicated that two complaints had been determined on 25 January 2010 (SBC 12) and on 11 February 2010 (SBC 14).

As regards complaint SBC 12, although the Consideration Sub-Committee had accepted the Investigating Officer's finding that the Councillor had not failed to comply with the code of conduct (paragraphs 3, 4(a) or 5), the Sub-Committee recommended that the Monitoring Officer should write to the constituent who had been involved in the matter to ensure that she was aware that the (complainant) Officer had acted appropriately and professionally in dealing with

the constituent's concerns. This had now been done.

### Complaints Outstanding

There had been no other complaints received since the last Committee report and there were no complaints awaiting determination.

### Other Matters

In March 2010 (after the Committee's meeting), an email was received from a parishioner raising concerns about alleged comments about the parishioner which a third party claimed certain parish councillors had made at a council meeting. The parishioner was provided with details of the arrangements for dealing with complaints under the code of conduct, together with a copy of the formal complaint form and accompanying notes. To date neither a completed complaint form, nor any further communication, had been received from the parishioner.

In May, concerns were received by telephone from a parishioner, regarding the way in which a parish matter was being handled and the way in which a particular councillor was allegedly dealing with the matter. The concerns were relayed to the relevant Corporate Director/Service and the steps being taken to resolve them were ongoing. To date no formal complaint had been made under the Code of Conduct and no further contact had been received.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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37/10**

### **Messages from the Standards Committee**

Members considered a report that provided details of messages from the Committee which had been publicised since the most recent meeting. At the Standards Committee meeting on 12 February 2010 it was agreed that a programme of messages from the Committee should be implemented in accordance with the arrangements outlined in the report. The Committee was provided with a copy of a message which had been publicised. This related to notable practice. The message had been sent to all council members and published on the council's website; circulated to council receptions, libraries, community centres, Tees Active, and sent to Tristar and to Town/Parish Councils. Further messages would be publicised over the coming months and details would be reported to the next available Committee meeting.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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38/10**

### **Local Assessment - Case Studies**

Members considered a case study and discussed what decisions they would make.

**S  
39/10**

### **Information/Discussion Items**

Members of the Committee considered the following items :-

1. Access to Standards & Probity Website Pages - Member discussed the SBC

website usage for the Standards and Probity pages throughout the period January - March. It was agreed that this would be monitored over another 3-6 month period for the Committee to review.

2. Annual Report of the Standards Committee 2009/10 - This was agreed at Council on 14th July 2010

3. Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer 2009/10 - This was agreed at Council on 14th July 2010.

4. Local Government Ombudsman's Review for the year 2009/10 - The Committee was informed that the council had been commended for a positive response to a housing benefit matter and for its general handling and response to complaints.

5. Coalition Government – Further Developments - Members were informed that Standards for England was undertaking a review of its activities in light of the reduction of in year funding and the proposals to abolish the standards board regime. In the meantime it had been decided that it was no longer necessary for authorities to send quarterly monitoring returns and the related website had been closed.

RESOLVED that the information be received and that it be agreed that a standards committee message regarding the ombudsman's 2009/10 review be published.

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40/10**

#### **Standards Committee Forward Plan 2010/11**

Consideration was given to the updated version of the Standards Committee Forward Plan. Members were again asked to consider whether there were other matters which should be included in the programme for future meetings.

RESOLVED that the Standards Committee Forward Plan be noted/received.