

Standards Committee

A meeting of Standards Committee was held on Friday, 23rd September, 2011.

Present: Mr F W Hayes(Chairman), Mr M Armstrong(Vice-Chair), Cllr Paul Baker, Cllr Ken Dixon, Mr C.V Algie(Parish Representative), Mr T. Bowman(Parish Representative) and Mr C. Nestor(Substitute Independent Member)

Officers: Mr S. Winship(RES), Mr A. Squires, Mr D.E Bond and Miss K. Wannop(LDS)

Also in attendance: None

Apologies: Cllr Tracey Stott and Cllr David Wilburn

S Evacuation Procedure

11/11

The evacuation procedure was noted.

S Declarations of Interest

12/11

Cllr Ken Dixon declared a personal non prejudicial interest in the item entitled Assessment Sub Committee Minutes for the Meetings held on 6th July and 11th August as he was an acquaintance of a person involved.

S Minutes for Signature - 6th January 2011, 31st March 2011 and 9th June 2011.

13/11

The Chairman signed the minutes of the meetings on 6th January 2011, 31st March 2011 and 9th June 2011 as a correct record.

S Assessment Sub Committee Minutes for the Meetings held on 6th July 2011 and 11th August 2011.

14/11

Members received the Assessment Sub Committee minutes of the meetings on 6th July 2011 and 11th August 2011.

RESOLVED that the minutes be noted.

S Review Sub Committee Minutes for the Meetings held on 14th July 2011 and 12th August 2011.

15/11

Members received the Review Sub Committee minutes of the meetings held on 14th July 2011 and 12th August 2011.

RESOLVED that the minutes be noted.

S Internal Audit Annual Report And Opinion Statement.

16/11

The Committee considered a report that provided Members with details of the Internal Audit Section's Annual Report for 2010/11. Included within the report was the statutory internal audit opinion statement on the Council's control environment.

Also included in the report were details of work carried out by the Internal Audit

Section in three audits that fell within the remit of the Committee during the quarter January to March 2011.

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.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

S
17/11 **Standards Committee Membership 2011/12**

Members considered a report that provided an update regarding the Standards Committee's membership for 2011/12.

Since the report to the Committee's meeting on 9 June 2011, the following Councillor was appointed to the Committee:-

Councillor Stott

There was still one vacancy.

The following Councillor was appointed as a Standards Committee substitute member:-

Councillor Large

There was still one vacancy.

Local Assessment training was being provided to those Members who had not previously received the training.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

S
18/11 **The New Standards Regime**

The Committee considered a report that provided a further update for Members regarding progress in relation to the Localism Bill and its proposals for a new national and local standards regime.

Since the report to the Committee on 9 June 2011, the Bill had progressed as follows:-

Committee (ten sittings) – House of Lords – 20 June 2011 to 20 July 2011

The Bill entered its Report stage in the House of Lords on 5 September. Further line by line examination of the Bill had taken place, involving consideration of a variety of amendments, including amendments proposed in relation to the Bill's standards provisions.

Members were provided with an issues and options paper which detailed the different options which were currently available, based on the Bill's provisions

when it was originally introduced into parliament. Members were also provided with a draft general principles of conduct guide for Members. The Committee would receive more information as the bill progressed further.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

S
19/11

Members' and Officers' Interests

Consideration was given to a report that provided the Committee with details regarding Members' and Officers' interests.

Several reminders about updating interests on the Member's registers were provided following the 5 May local elections and the Annual Meeting on 25 May. The reminders also covered co-optees and their details on the register. A message from the Standards Committee about Members registering their interests was also issued in August. Revised register details continued to be received on a regular basis. However as at 13 September 2011, FOUR continuing Members had not confirmed whether or not their interests had changed since their last return, and 1 new Member had not submitted a return. Advice about interests continued to be provided before Cabinet and Council meetings and on an ad hoc basis when required e.g. in relation to potential conflicts of interest at Select Committee and Planning Committee meetings. Examples of recent declarations by Members were provided. Advice had been and would continue to be provided to Members in connection with their roles on external organisations (e.g. NHS Trust Members).

A (Monitoring Officer) register inspection of the Officers Interest Register took place on 3 August 2011. The register was however being reviewed in consultation with services, in order to reflect the significant changes occurring as a result of the Council's Value for Money Programme. Officers were last asked to review and update their register details on 30 June 2011.

Updates to Town/Parish Council registers were received fairly regularly particularly in view of the recent local elections and advice about declarations of interest continued to be provided to Town/Parish Council Clerks when requested or considered necessary. A request for an up to date copy register from each Town/Parish Council was made on 24 August, 2011. Completed registers had been received from all but 3 councils.

As previously reported, work had been undertaken with relevant Officers and Board Members to ensure that registration and declaration of interests become more embedded in the governance arrangements of partnerships, Renaissance and TVU. This included case study workshops with the Sub-Boards. TVU retained a separate register of Board Members' interests. Access to the Council's register was available for Councillors who were also TVU Board Members.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

S
20/11

Members' and Officers' Gifts and Hospitality

Members considered a report that provided details of the procedures relating to Members' and Officers' gifts and hospitality and the returns submitted during the

current municipal year.

The Members' Register was reviewed on 3 August 2011. There were 12 recorded examples of gifts/hospitality received by Members for the period January to July 2011 inclusively. For the most part (9) these concerned hospitality received by the Worshipful the Mayor and Deputy Mayor in the course of their civic duties and attendance at awards ceremonies and conferences by portfolio holders. Members were last asked to update their register details following the 5 May, local elections. Advice had been and would continue to be provided to Members in connection with their roles on other organisations.

A review of the Officers' gifts and hospitality register took place on 3 August 2011. There were 31 entries for gifts/hospitality for the period January to July 2011. Of these, 8 were for the same hospitality received by different Officers. The majority of the entries concerned hospitality from existing partners or contractors and for the most part involved Officers attending awards ceremonies, charity events or conferences. Officers were last reminded about updating their register details on 30 June 2011.

Town/Parish Councils were asked to ensure that their Councillors provided details of any gifts or hospitality offered/received (together with their interests) in a message from the Standards Committee on the 10 August and by email on 24 August 2011. No returns specifically relating to gifts and hospitality had been received to date.

Work had been undertaken with Officers and Board Members to ensure that all relevant standards and probity arrangements become more embedded in the governance arrangements of partnerships, Renaissance and TVU.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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Monitoring Officer Work Programme - 2011/12

21/11

The Committee was provided with details of progress in delivering the Monitoring Officer work programme for 2011/12.

The Monitoring Officer Annual Report for 2010/11 was approved by Council on 29 June 2011 which included a work programme for 2011/12. Members were provided with a schedule containing details of the progress in delivering the work programme. The schedule set out four improvement areas, key actions for each, the target dates for completion, progress details and any comments.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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Misconduct Allegations Update

22/11

The Committee considered a report that provided an update regarding misconduct allegations received by the Authority.

The last report regarding complaints was considered by the Committee at its meeting on 9 June 2011.

The review of the complaints which were considered by the Assessment Sub-Committee on 14 April 2011 (in respect of two Borough Councillors), took place on 14 July (SBC16). The Review Sub-Committee reached the same decision as the Assessment Sub-Committee had done, which was that no action should be taken.

Two further complaints each related to the same issues (in relation to four Parish Councillors), had been received (SBC18/19). These matters were considered by the Assessment Sub-Committee on 11 August 2011. The Sub-Committee decided that certain elements of the allegations should be the subject of other action, in the form of advice and guidance on the code of conduct being provided to some of the Councillors concerned. This had been actioned and the outcome would be reported back to the Sub-Committee.

A further complaint (regarding a Borough Councillor) (SBC17) was considered by the Assessment Sub-Committee on 6 July 2011. The Sub-Committee decided that no further action should be taken. At the complainant's request this decision was the subject of a review (on the 12 August). The Review Sub-Committee agreed with the previous decision to take no further action regarding the complaint.

There were currently no outstanding matters.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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23/11 **Messages from the Standards Committee**

Members considered a report which provided details of the most recent messages from the Committee. 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 the messages which had been publicised. These related to Members' Interests', Social Networking and Lobbying. The messages had been published on the council's website; circulated to council receptions, libraries, community centres, Tees Active, 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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24/11 **Local Assessment - Case Studies**

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

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25/11 **Information/Discussion Items**

Members of the Committee considered the following items :-

1. Standards Committee Annual Report 2010/11
2. Monitoring Officer's Annual Report 2010/11

3. Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11
4. Audit Committee Work Programme 2011/12
5. Annual Governance Statement 2010/11
6. Standards for England's Annual Report and Accounts 2010/11

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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26/11

Standards Committee Forward Plan 2011/12

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. Members also received the Councils Statutory Forward Plan.