

# STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2005

**PRESENT:** The Chair (John Lay), Councillor Murray, Judith Harley (Oxford City Conservative Party representative), Chris Turner (independent member).

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Jeremy Thomas (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), William Reed (Democratic Services Manager).

The Chair welcomed Jeremy Thomas to the meeting as the Council's Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

## 14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the Vice-Chair (Diana Woodhouse), Councillor Sellwood, Val Smith (Labour Group representative) and John Batey (Parish Council representative).

## 15. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Resolved to note the contents of the note (previously circulated and now appended) setting out guidance on declarations of interests. There were no declarations of interest.

## 16. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

## 17. MINUTES

- (1) Resolved that the minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of the Committee held on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2005 be confirmed as a correct record subject to the numbering of the minutes being altered from the second minute 6 onwards and to the first date in minute 13 reading 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2005.
- (2) With reference to minute 6 that dealt with corporate complaints, resolved:-
  - (a) to note that a review of the Constitution would be submitted to the Council meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2005;

- (b) that a report should be submitted to the Committee at least annually on Corporate Complaints and that, among other things, the report should include year on year comparisons of complaints by number and by type.
- (3) With reference to minute 10 (MEMBER TRAINING), resolved:-
- (a) to record that the training on dealing with investigations that had been held at the offices of the South Oxfordshire District Council had been useful;
  - (b) that general training on the ethical framework was for the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to arrange.
- (4) With reference to minute 9 (MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT – REVIEW), resolved to note that the Standards Board for England had now submitted the outcome of the review to the Government and the Democratic Services Manager would report to the next meeting of the Committee upon progress and the report would compare the review submission with the Council's own comments.
- (5) With reference to minute 11 (CONSTITUTION REVIEW) resolved:-
- (a) to note that the review would be submitted to Council on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2005 and that the review would include any comments of members and officers on the Whistleblowing Policy and the Protocol on Member/Officer Relations;
  - (b) that all members of the Standards Committee be supplied with a copy of the Constitution Review report in the form in which it would be submitted to Council.

## **18. STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND CONFERENCE 2005**

Judith Harley reported back on the 2005 Standards Board for England Conference. She referred particularly to the involvement of Standards Committees with the work of local authorities and to complaints handling. She said that the independent members of some Standards Committee were involved in Council meetings. She also said that where local authorities had had local hearings, lessons had been learnt as a result. The City Council had had no local hearings and there was a risk that the Standards Committee could become complaisant.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services accepted that where there had been no local hearings Standards Committee might feel undervalued. However, it might be said to be a good indication of the way in which a local authority conducted itself if there were no local hearings.

Resolved:-

- (1) to thank Judith Harley for her report back;
- (2) to record that a balance had to be struck between the extent to which a Standards Committee should be pro-active and the extent to which it should maintain an overseeing role;
- (3) that independent members be sent details of the dates of Committee and Council meetings so that they could decide whether or not to attend as observers;
- (4) that there was merit in the Committee submitting an annual report to Council on its work.

## **19. AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

The Strategic Director, Finance and Corporate Services submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended).

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services reported that the Executive Board had considered the report on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2005 and had agreed the report's recommendations. The report would be considered by Council on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2005.

Resolved to RECOMMEND Council that to avoid confusion with the Committee's responsibility for the Members' Code of Conduct, the words "legal and code of conduct" be deleted from the third bullet point of part (1) of the powers and duties as set out in Appendix 1 to the Strategic Director's report.

## **20. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Resolved to note that the Committee would meet at 10.30 a.m. on the following dates in the current Council Year if there was business to warrant the meetings:-

- Friday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2006
- Friday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2006

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and closed at 11.09 pm.