

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Friday 8th June 2007

PRESENT : The Chair (John Lay), the Vice Chair (Chris Turner), and Councillors Dhall and Hollander.

OFFICERS PRESENT : Jeremy Thomas (Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer), Lindsay Cane, Helen Lynch and William Reed (Legal and Democratic Services Business Unit).

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE COUNCIL YEAR 2007/08

Resolved that John Lay be elected Chair of the Committee for the 2007/08 Council Year.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE COUNCIL YEAR 2007/08

Resolved that Chris Turner be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2007/08 Council Year.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Sargent.

The Committee asked that, for the sake of certainty, if any member of the Committee was unable to attend a Standards Committee meeting they should submit their apologies to the clerk to the Committee.

4. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

The Democratic Services Manager submitted a note (previously circulated and now appended). He said that the IWCA Group was represented on the Committee by Councillor Kent and not by Councillor Craft as the note showed.

On the independent member vacancy the Democratic Services Manager said that an advertisement to recruit to the vacancy would be placed shortly at a time designed not to coincide with the recruitment processes of any other local authority in the County. Depending upon the interest shown, the Committee and Council could then decide whether to increase the number of independent members on the Committee.

On the Parish Council vacancy, the Democratic Services Manager said that he had written to the four Parish Councils in Oxford but had not yet received a jointly agreed nomination from them.

Resolved to note the position.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

The Democratic Services Manager submitted a note (previously circulated and now appended). No declarations of interests were made.

6. POWERS AND DUTIES

Resolved to note the contents of a note (previously circulated and now appended) that set out the Committee's powers and duties.

7. MINUTES

- (1) Resolved that the minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of the Committee held on 9th March 2007 be confirmed as a correct record.
- (2) With reference to minute 48(b) (Standards Board Roadshows) the Democratic Services Manager reported that he would be attending the Roadshow in Swindon. The Birmingham and London Roadshows were now fully subscribed.

Resolved that if a Member wished to attend one of the Roadshows they should let the Democratic Services Manager know so that he could make the necessary arrangements.

8. MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended).

Resolved:-

- (1) That Council be RECOMMENDED:-
 - (i) To adopt the new Model Code of Conduct appended to the report together with, as an annex, the ten general principles to govern the conduct of members, to replace the Council's existing Code;
 - (ii) That the new Code should take effect as from 1st July 2007;

- (iii) In relation to paragraph 4.(iv)(bb) of the Code (disclosure in good faith of confidential information in compliance with the reasonable requirements of the Authority), that the “reasonable requirements” in such cases should be that members first seek the views of the Monitoring Officer, and that this requirement be reflected in the Constitution;
- (2) To note that a series of training sessions on the new Code had been arranged, and to advise members that the Committee considered that in order to maintain high standards of conduct in the Council, members of the Council should each attend at least one of the training sessions.

9. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE WORK OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended).

Resolved that, with the following changes, the Annual Report be submitted to Council:-

- (a) In paragraph 5, delete the word “whistleblowing” and insert the words “and the whistleblowing policy”;
- (b) In paragraph 13, insert the word “prejudicial” before the word “personal”;
- (c) In paragraph 20 delete the word “quarterly” and insert the words “half-yearly”.

9. STANDARDS OF CONDUCT BY COUNCILLORS – LOCAL HEARINGS

The Monitoring Officer reminded the Committee that at its meeting on 1st December 2006 (minute 30) it had asked him to write to the Standards Board expressing the Council’s concern on grounds of time, cost, consistency of approach and increasing workload of the proposed introduction of the “local filter” for dealing with alleged breaches of the Code. He submitted a response (previously circulated and now appended) that he had received from the Chief Executive of the Standards Board.

Resolved to note the content of the response letter.

10. COUNCIL CONSTITUTION

The Monitoring Officer submitted the following codes of practice and guidance (all previously circulated and now appended) as included in the new Constitution;

- Code on Councillor – Officer Relations

- Planning Code of Practice
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Code on Use of IT equipment

He explained that the code on the use of IT equipment was a new Code. He said that the Committee was responsible for overseeing and advising on each Code.

Resolved:-

- (1) To ask that the codes be brought to the Committee on an annual basis for review;
- (2) That for the sake of consistency, paragraph 28.10 of the IT Code should say that it should regularly be reviewed by the Standards Committee.

11. STANDARDS COMMITTEE INDEPENDENT MEMBERS' FORUM

Resolved:-

1. To receive and note the contents of the notes (previously circulated and now appended) of the Forum's meeting held on the 20th April 2007;
2. To note that the next meeting of the Forum would be held at Wokingham on 19th October 2007.

12 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved:-

- (1) To note that the Committee's meeting dates for the remainder of the Council year would be as follows:-
 - Friday 7th September 2007
 - Friday 7th December 2007
 - Friday 7th March 2008
- (2) That, subject to review at the Committee's September meeting, the Committee's meetings should commence at 10am.

The meeting commenced at approximately 10.10 am and closed at 10.45 am.