

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Friday 7th September 2007

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

OFFICERS PRESENT : Jeremy Thomas (Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer), Brendan Biggs, Helen Lynch and William Reed (Legal and Democratic Services Business Unit) and Michael Newman (Corporate Secretariat, Chief Executive's Office).

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dhall and Sanders.

14. MINUTES

- (1) Resolved that the minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of the Committee held on 8th June 2007 be confirmed as a correct record.
- (2) With reference to Minute 4 (MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE), the Democratic Services Manager reported that there were currently two vacancies on the Committee. One was for a parish representative to represent the four Oxford parish councils. Whilst a name had been given to him by one of the four parish councils he was currently ascertaining whether it had been agreed by all four parish councils that that person should represent them on the Standards Committee.

The other vacancy was for an independent member. This vacancy was currently being advertised and some interest had been shown.

Resolved:-

- (i) To note the position in relation to the vacancy for a parish council representative;
- (ii) On the independent member vacancy:-
 - (a) to agree that, depending upon the quality of applicants, more than one member might be appointed, and, depending upon the outcome of interviews, the Monitoring Officer would recommend Council, after consultation with the Chair, if the appointment of more than one member seemed appropriate;

(b) that Councillors Hollander, Sanders and Sargent should form the Panel to interview short-listed applicants, and that interviews should take place on the morning of Tuesday 9th October.

- (3) With reference to Minute 7 as it related to Standards Board Roadshows, the Democratic Services Manager reported that he had attended the Swindon Roadshow. He outlined the presentations. In particular he said that the Chair of the Standards Board on behalf of the Board had undertaken that the Board would consider drafting and issuing a model form that members could complete to register their interests under the new Code. The Chief Executive of the Board had reported that the Board would shortly issue advice on bias, pre-determination and pre-disposition. The Democratic Services Manager said that that guidance had now been issued.

Resolved to note that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services would circulate to members the advice on bias, pre-determination and pre-disposition, or a digest of it.

- (4) With reference to Minute 8 as it related to training on the Code of Conduct:-
- (i) To note that a number of training sessions had been run and that they had been well received;
 - (ii) To ask the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to address the points raised by Councillor Sargent concerning the consequences of member suspension following an investigation under the Code, and to report upon them to the next meeting of the Committee.
- (5) With reference to Minute 10 (COUNCIL CONSTITUTION) as it related to Codes of Practice and Guidance for which the Committee was responsible:-
- (i) That the Annual Review referred to in the Minute should take place at the last meeting of the Committee in each Council Year;
 - (ii) To note that the amendment to the IT Code referred to in the minute had been agreed by Council on 3rd September 2007.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a Guidance Note (previously circulated and now appended). No declarations of interest were made by any member of the Committee.

16. STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND – INVESTIGATION – DECISION NOTICE

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

Resolved:-

- (1) To receive the report;
- (2) To ask the Monitoring Officer to consider:-
 - (i) whether the full report on the investigation could be made available to the Committee;
 - (ii) the process involved in the investigation and what lessons could be learnt from it in relation to hearings the Council might need to conduct.

17. STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND – ANNUAL REPORT

Resolved to receive and note the contents of the Annual Report (previously circulated and now appended) of the Standards Board for England.

18. CODE OF CONDUCT AND REGISTER OF INTERESTS

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended). He confirmed that all members and co-opted members of the City Council had completed a new Register of Interests form. As to Code training, one more session was planned. Assuming attendance by the members of Council booked onto this last session, this would leave six Councillors who had not attended any training session.

As to Parish Councils, he was currently checking whether all Parish Councillors of those two Parish Councils that had adopted the new Code had completed their new Register of Interests form.

Resolved:-

- (1) To thank the Head of Legal and Democratic Services for arranging and conducting a comprehensive programme of Code training;
- (2) To ask the Democratic Services Manager to write on behalf of the Committee to those members who had not yet indicated that they would attend Code training to urge them to attend and to point out the positive benefits to themselves and the Council if they did so;

- (3) To ask the Democratic Services Manager to report back to the next meeting of the Committee on which, if any, members by then had not attended Code training and on the position as far as Parish Councils was concerned.

19. COMPLAINTS MONITORING – QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS

The Chief Executive submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended).

Resolved:-

- (1) To thank the Chief Executive for the report;
- (2) To ask the Chair of the Committee to write to the new Chief Executive on the Committee's behalf to invite him to attend the Committee's next meeting and to ask him:-
 - (i) to speak upon the embedding of complaints handling into the proposed management restructure;
 - ii) to address response times when the officer handling or who would normally handle a complaint in a particular service area was absent from work;
- (3) To ask that for the next complaints monitoring report:-
 - (i) for Stage 3 complaints (i.e. those handled by the Chief Executive and Directors) an indication be given of the number of such complaints that had been supported or submitted by a Councillor;
 - (ii) further details of Ombudsman complaints be included.

20. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved:-

- (1) To note that the Committee would meet on the following dates in the remainder of the current Council Year provided that there was business to warrant holding a meeting:-

Friday 7th December 2007

Friday 7th March 2008

- (2) That the Committee's meetings would start at 10.00 a.m. and not at 10.30 a.m.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and closed at 11.08 a.m. The Committee then watched a DVD entitled "The Code Uncovered " that had been produced by the Standards Board for England on the new Code of Conduct.