

# **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Friday 4 December 2009

**PRESENT:** The Chair (John Lay), The Vice-Chair (Anne Gwinnett), Councillors Brundin, Craft and Smith; Chris Ballinger, Meryll Dean and Martin Gardner (Independent Members).

**COUNCIL OFFICERS PRESENT:** Jeremy Thomas (Head of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer); William Reed (Democratic Services Manager), Helen Lynch (Legal Services); Alec Dubberley (Democratic Services).

Nils Bartleet, Prospective Parish Council representative, was also in attendance.

## **27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sanders.

## **28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interests by the Committee members present.

## **29. MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of the Committee held on 2nd October 2009 be confirmed as a correct record.

## **30. PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE**

The Democratic Services Manager reported that of the two Parish Council representatives currently serving on the Committee, one had resigned. Nominations from Parish Councils had been sought and one nomination had been received, namely Nils Bartleet from Old Marston Parish Council. As the deadline for nominations had passed, Mr Bartleet's name would be recommended for confirmation as an Independent Member at the next Council meeting in January.

The Committee supported the nomination of Parish Councillor Nils Bartleet as the Committee's second Parish Council representative.

### **31. STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND ASSEMBLY 2009**

The Head of Law and Governance reported verbally on the recent Annual Assembly and said that there were no new developments or announcements to report back to the Committee.

RESOLVED to note the position.

### **32. ETHICAL GOVERNANCE – MEETING WITH LEADER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) He advised of a recent Senior Management restructure that would preserve the high profile position of the Monitoring Officer in the organisation.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the report and the details of the revised Senior Management structure be noted; and
- (2) That the establishment of regular liaison meetings as detailed in the report be welcomed.

### **33. COMPLAINTS MONITORING**

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

Arising from the report members asked how complaints about the Council's partner service providers (e.g. Fusion Leisure) were dealt with and monitored. The Monitoring Officer explained, in general terms, the Council's customer relationship management service and how it could be used to provide information about complaints and should help to drive down the level of complaints.

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

### **34. TRAINING PLAN**

The Democratic Services Manager reported that work was ongoing in formulating a member training plan for implementation after the next City Council elections and that a written report would be submitted to the March meeting giving further details. Members were reminded of the forthcoming Oxfordshire Standards Committee event scheduled for 14 January.

The Committee noted the position and asked that all members of the Committee be reminded of the event.

### **35. CODE OF CONDUCT AND OTHER TRAINING FOR MEMBERS**

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended) updating the Committee on Councillor training.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) To record that the Committee would expect required or mandatory training to have been completed at an earlier stage in future years;
- (2) To ask the Monitoring Officer to advise the Committee when the Government had issued the revised Members' Code of Conduct.

### **36. ASSESSMENT PANEL ANALYSIS**

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) giving details of Assessment Panels held to date.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) To note the report;
- (2) To ask that in future analyses, details of the average time taken for complaints to reach the assessment panel, and the amount of officer time involved be included in the report;
- (3) To note that a special meeting would be held in January to deal with a standards investigation.

### **37. COMMITTEE EFFECTIVENESS AND PROFILE**

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended) outlining ways to enhance the profile of the Committee.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) In relation to paragraphs 8 and 9 of the report (possible transfer of responsibilities between the Committee and the Audit and Governance Committee involving complaints monitoring and the annual Governance Statement), not to agree to such a transfer but to ask that the Chair and Vice-Chair should see the annual Governance Statement in draft in order to enable them to offer

comments upon it before it went to the Audit and Governance Committee;

- (2) That learning points emerging from the assessment panel analysis (minute 36 refers) be addressed in the 2010 Code training together with any learning points there might be from cases involving other local authorities;
- (3) That the periodic meeting between the Chair and Vice-Chair, the Leader and the Chief Executive should consider past assessment panel cases with a view to deciding whether any action of a general nature ought to be taken to raise ethical standards;
- (4) To ask the Monitoring Officer to pursue the following matters contained in the report:-
  - (a) Explanation to members of the nature and purpose of assessment panels (paragraph 6 (a) of the report refers);
  - (b) Delivery to members of the annual report (paragraph 6 (b) of the report refers);
  - (c) Involvement of Group Leaders in the Committee's work programme (paragraph 6 (c) of the report refers);
  - (d) Standards Committee web page (paragraph 7 of the report refers);
  - (e) Dissemination of decisions of the Standards Committee (paragraph 7 of the report refers).

### **38. PARISH COUNCIL MATTERS**

The Democratic Services Manager reported that a new Clerk had been appointed to Blackbird Leys Parish Council.

The Committee noted the position.

### **39. STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND – ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09**

The Head of Law and Governance submitted the Annual Report (previously circulated, now appended) of Standards for England.

The Committee noted the report.

#### **40. STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND PUBLICATIONS**

The Committee noted new guidance (previously circulated, now appended) issued by Standards for England on the following:-

- Personal and prejudicial interests
- Lobbying
- Bullying and the Code of Conduct

#### **41. ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR ENGLAND**

The Committee noted a letter (previously circulated, now appended) from the Adjudication Panel for England.

#### **42. INDEPENDENT MEMBERS' FORUM MATTERS**

The Democratic Services Manager reported that the Oxfordshire Independent Members' Forum was still inactive although the event scheduled for January might establish a more regular forum.

The Committee noted the position.

#### **43. DATE OF NEXT ORDINARY MEETING**

The Committee noted that the next ordinary meeting would take place on Friday 5 March 2010 at 3.00 pm. A special meeting would be arranged for January to consider the findings of an investigation into a complaint.

The meeting commenced at 9.30 am and closed at 11.00 am.

# STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Thursday 21 January 2010

**PRESENT:** The Chair (John Lay), The Vice-Chair (Anne Gwinnett), Councillors Brundin, Craft and Smith; Chris Ballinger, Meryll Dean and Martin Gardner (Independent Members).

**COUNCIL OFFICERS PRESENT:** Jeremy Thomas (Head of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer); Helen Lynch (Legal Services); Alec Dubberley (Democratic Services).

## 44. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

## 45. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In response to a query from Anne Gwinnett, the Monitoring Officer advised that both her own and Meryll Dean's employment at Oxford Brookes University was not, in his professional opinion, an interest that needed to be declared for this meeting.

## 46. LOCAL INVESTIGATION REPORT – CASE REFERENCE 703/4/18

The Committee considered a report by the Monitoring Officer (previously circulated, now appended) to which was attached the final report and relevant documents prepared by the Investigating Officer appointed to investigate the alleged conduct of Councillor Roy Darke.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the Committee was required to decide whether, based on the facts presented, if it agreed or otherwise with the findings of the Investigating Officer. Helen Lynch, the Investigating Officer summarised her investigation report. Members proceeded to consider the evidence presented by the investigation officer and the conclusions subsequently drawn in respect of the allegations.

After careful discussion, it was

RESOLVED (unanimously)

- (1) To agree with the finding of the Investigating Officer that Councillor Roy Darke did not fail to comply with the provisions of Oxford City Council's Code of Conduct in relation to declaring interests.

(2) That the Committee place on record their appreciation to Ms Helen Lynch, Investigating Officer for her comprehensive report.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 5.50 pm.  
There were 8 members of the public present.