

Standards Committee

Wednesday, 16th February, 2011

PRESENT:

Independent Members

Gordon Tollefson (Chair)
Joanne Austin
Rosemary Greaves
Philip Turnpenny

Councillors

C Campbell	B Selby	E Nash
B Gettings	J L Carter	

Parish Members

Councillor P Cook	Morley Town Council
Councillor Mrs P Walker	Pool in Wharfedale Parish Council

APOLOGIES:

Councillors J Priestley, J Harper and R D Feldman

19 Appeals against refusal of inspection of documents

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents in accordance with Procedure Rule 25 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules.

20 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no resolutions to exclude the public.

21 Late items

There were no late items submitted to the agenda by the Chair for consideration.

22 Declaration of interests

There were no declarations of personal/prejudicial interests for the purpose of section 81(3) of the Local Government Act 2000 and paragraphs 8 to 12 of the Members' Code of Conduct.

23 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 13th July 2010 were approved as a correct record.

Further to Minute 5, the Chair informed the Committee that he had attended the Whips meeting held on 13th July 2010 and had received some constructive comments.

Further to Minute 17(b), the Chair reported that Member Management Committee would be asked to comment upon the proposed amendments to the Members E-Mail Code of Practice at its meeting to be held on 29th March 2011.

24 Minutes of the Assessment Sub-Committee

The minutes of the Assessment Sub-Committee meeting held on 13th December 2010 were received and noted.

25 Minutes of the Consideration Sub-Committee

The minutes of the Consideration Sub-Committee meetings held on 29th June and 13th December 2010 were received and noted.

26 Minutes of the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee

The minutes of the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee meetings held on 30th June, 29th July, 29th September, 15th November, 14th December 2010 and 24th January 2011 were received and noted.

Members queried whether the inclusion of the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee minutes with the Standards Committee agenda was necessary. The Chair undertook to discuss this further with the Chair of the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee and the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance).

27 Officer/Employee Code of Conduct

The Head of Human Resources presented a report of the Chief Officer (Human Resources) providing an update on the work which has taken place, and is taking place, around the Code of Conduct which applies to staff. It was reported that legal advice is currently being sought as to whether it is lawful to require employees to register their membership of the Freemasons, following a letter received from the Grand Lodge.

Members particularly discussed the need to include more information in the Code of Conduct regarding vexatious complaints against Members, and how this would be dealt with.

The need to require employees with decision making powers to publicly register their interests was also discussed. Members were informed of the arrangements currently in place in different departments to help to ensure that employees declare conflicts of interest.

The Head of Human Resources undertook to refer the Committee's comments to the Chief Officer (Human Resources) in order that they can be considered as part of the review of the Employee Code of Conduct, and inform the Committee of the timeframe for the review within the next 7 days.

RESOLVED – Members of the Standards Committee resolved to:

- (a) note the report;
- (b) request that the Committee's comments are referred to the Chief Officer (Human Resources) and taken into account as part of the review of the Employee Code of Conduct; and
- (c) request that the Head of Human Resources informs the Committee of the timeframe for the review of the Employee Code of Conduct within the next 7 days.

28 Ethical Audit Action Plan: HR Issues Update

The Head of Human Resources presented a report of the Chief Officer (Human Resources) providing a final update to the Committee on the actions assigned to the Chief Officer (Human Resources) as a result of the Ethical Audits undertaken in 2006 and 2007.

Members particularly discussed the meaning of 'operational matters' and the types of issues that it would be inappropriate for a Member to become involved in, such as staffing matters.

RESOLVED - Members of the Standards Committee resolved to:

- (a) note the contents of the report; and
- (b) note the more targeted approach to potential risk areas set out in paragraphs 4.3 and 4.4 of the report.

29 Implications of the Localism Bill for the Ethical Framework in Leeds

The Head of Governance Services presented a report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance) briefing Members of the Standards Committee on the aspects of the Localism Bill which relate to the Council's ethical governance arrangements, specifically the Members' Code of Conduct, Standards Committee, and local assessment arrangements.

The following issues were discussed:

- The Localism Bill proposes to impose a duty on Councils to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and co-opted members of the authority, even though there would be no obligation to adopt a Code of Conduct;
- Conduct issues could be dealt with through group Whips, or criminal law for more serious matters, instead of a Code of Conduct;

- It would be useful to create a guidance note for Members on how to behave;
- Comparisons of the way in which conduct matters were handled in other organisations;
- The current threshold at which it is necessary to register the receipt of gifts and hospitality (£25.00) is too low and should rise to £50.00 to be in line with the threshold for election returns;
- Members should only have to register interests that are relevant to the decisions they take; and
- It is too early to comment upon the proposals in the Localism Bill as it could be amended before it receives Royal Assent, therefore the report should be noted.

RESOLVED – Members of the Standards Committee resolved to note the report.

30 Standards Committee - Interim Annual Report

The Corporate Governance Officer presented a report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance) providing members of the Standards Committee with performance information regarding the Standards Committee's activities during the 2010/11 municipal year.

RESOLVED – Members of the Standards Committee resolved to:

- (a) note the contents of the report;
- (b) agree that the information in the report will form the basis of the Standards Committee's Annual Report for the current municipal year; and
- (c) agree that the information in the report be presented to the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee as part of the six monthly reporting arrangements.

31 Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer

The Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance) presented a report providing the Monitoring Officer's Annual Report which is required under paragraph 5 of the Monitoring Officer Protocol.

RESOLVED – Members of the Standards Committee resolved to:

- (a) note the assurances and performance information provided in the report; and
- (b) request that all Members are notified that this report is available.

32 Standards Committee Work Programme

The Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance) submitted a report notifying Members of the Committee of the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year. Members were asked to cancel the final meeting of the municipal year which was due to be held on 20th April 2011, as there were no scheduled items.

RESOLVED – Members of the Standards Committee resolved to:

(a) note the work programme; and

(b) agree that the Standards Committee meeting due to be held on 20th April 2011 be cancelled.

33 Chair's Closing Remarks

The Chair informed the Committee that Rosemary Greaves' and Councillor John Priestley's term of office would expire on 26th May 2011, therefore this would be their final Standards Committee meeting. It had been decided not to seek any re-appointments due to the reduction in the workload of the Committee and the proposals in the Localism Bill.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair expressed his appreciation to Ms Greaves and Councillor Priestley for their service and helpful contributions.