

A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

WAS HELD ON 23 APRIL 2009

Councillors Ms Ballard (P), Burgess (P), Cully (P), Hicks (P), Langdon and Wright (P).

Independent Members: Mr R V Perry (P) and Mr G Lidgley.

51. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were submitted on behalf of Mr Lidgley and Councillor Langdon.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hicks declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item 12 on the agenda (Standards Board for England Reports).

53. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards and Governance Committee held on 19 March 2009 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

54. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations.

55. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

PART II

56. INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Internal Audit & Risk Assurance which was required, in accordance with the national Code of Practice on Internal Audit, to be presented as an annual report to the appropriate body having responsibility for the Internal Audit function.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the report be noted.

57. DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2008/09

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Internal Audit & Risk Assurance which brought Members' attention to the current draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) to be presented to the June 2009 Policy & Organisation Board meeting in conjunction with the Council's Annual Accounts for 2008/09.

RESOLVED: That the draft Annual Governance Statement be approved.

58. ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER

Linda Krywald and Jane Burns of the Audit Commission and Mike Attenborough-Cox and Jason Foxwell of Mazars were welcomed by the Chairman of the Committee.

It was reported that the Council had made good progress in terms of performance but there were concerns with the long and medium-term financial situation. There were also concerns regarding cross-party working on the long-term financial strategy.

With regard to community safety, Members were advised that the Council's role was to work in partnership with the police and other agencies, an example being work on out of school activities.

With regard to cross-party working, Members felt that this did not seem to be an issue with the public and that, on some issues, the political groups had worked well together.

With regard to the speed of dealing with planning applications, Members were advised that there had been problems earlier in the year but these had now been rectified. The current recession had also affected the number of applications made.

With regard to staff sickness levels, Members were advised that measures were in place to try to address any problems; a change of culture was being encouraged in this area.

Members asked how a better Use of Resources score could be achieved when the Council had few resources but high demands on them. Members were advised that the responsibility of the Council was to ensure that existing resources were used efficiently. It was suggested that whole life costing for future investments could be made.

The Chairman thanked the representatives from the Audit Commission and Mazars for their attendance at the Committee meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter be received.

59. STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

Consideration was given to the Workplan of the Standards and Governance Committee.

Members were advised that the Workplan had been revised and updated and that the work of the Committee was now timetabled up until April 2010.

The Committee was advised that the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who had looked into new Member induction, should be taken into account when this issue was reported upon at the Standards and Governance Committee meeting in October 2009.

Resolved: That the Workplan be noted.

60. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That in relation to the following item the public be excluded from the meeting, as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during this item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information within Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and further that in all circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

61. STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND REPORTS

Note: Councillor Hicks declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this item, left the meeting room and took no part in the discussion or voting thereon.

This report was exempt from publication as the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information. The information in the Standards Board's report related a number of individuals' personal experiences and circumstances that were not considered appropriate to be released to the public. The public would be able to find out the outcome of the investigations as summaries were available from the Standards Board for England. In order to ensure that members of the public raised concerns regarding standards of conduct in public office, the confidentiality of the complaints system is an important tool.

Consideration was given to an exempt report of the Monitoring Officer.

Members were advised that attempts had been made to obtain a definition of "close association" from the Standards Board for England but, as yet, none had been received.

The Chief Executive advised that officers could encounter difficulties when giving evidence to the Standards Board for England regarding Councillors' conduct. Members held the view that officers should not feel under any threat when giving evidence.

RESOLVED: That the Monitoring Officer's report be noted.

62. VOTE OF THANKS

Mr Perry was thanked by the Committee for his chairmanship during the Municipal Year 2008/09.

The meeting commenced at 6.00pm and concluded at 7.00 p.m.

CHAIRMAN