

**A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
WAS HELD ON 22 APRIL 2010**

Councillors Burgess (P), Cully, Forder (P), Gill, Kimber (P) and Wright (P).

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

It was reported that, in accordance with Standing Orders, Councillor Mrs Forder had been nominated to replace Councillor Gill for this meeting.

51. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cully and Gill.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

53. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards and Governance Committee held on 18 March 2010 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. INDUCTION AND TRAINING FOR MEMBERS FOR 2010/2011

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Solicitor which advised the Committee of the proposals for Induction and Training for Members for 2010/2011.

Members raised the issue of withholding Members' allowances until required training had been completed. The meeting was informed that there was no information available as to whether or not the Council could pursue this course of action, which would need approval by full Council. A report on the proposed repopulation of the Members' Allowances Panel would be presented to Council on 19 May 2010. Any discussion on the withholding of Members' allowances would be undertaken by the Panel in the first instance.

Members were advised that fundamental training for Councillors should include the Code of Conduct, Member/Officer relations, financial awareness and the work of the Regulatory Board and the Licensing Sub-Board. These areas of training had been offered last year both in-house and externally and also via external material, the Members' Information Bulletin and the Members' Library. It was important for the content and volume of training to be understandable and digestible.

Members felt that expectations and standards for Members should be made clear and training could be used for this purpose. The expectations of External Audit for some Member training were regarded as becoming more and more onerous and appeared to be aimed more at portfolio holders.

There was increasing pressure from new national codes and external inspection that Members should be trained in the areas of risk management, procurement and treasury management in order that they may be better informed to ask questions and make challenges. It would be expensive to employ external trainers but this training may be more suitable than could be provided in-house.

It was stressed that induction training following elections was aimed at all Members and not solely those who had been newly elected.

The view was expressed that, although training was valuable, it was unlikely to affect Members' behaviour, which often dictated the way in which the Council was perceived by the general public and businesses. It was felt that mentoring by experienced Members could prove to be a useful resource.

It had been hoped that the quasi-judicial process of the Standards Board for England would help to solve heightened political problems in Gosport but this had not happened. The onus should therefore rest with local Members to resolve these problems.

RESOLVED: That the proposals set out in Section 2 and the recommendation in Section 3 of the Borough Solicitor's report be approved.

57. DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2009/10

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Internal Audit and Risk Assurance which brought to the attention of the Committee the current draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) to be presented to June 2010 Policy & Organisation Board in conjunction with the Council's Annual Accounts for 2009/10.

Members were advised that the Draft Annual Governance Statement was a first draft which required some fine tuning with no significant issues having been identified. The observations of the external auditors and the closure of the Council's Annual Accounts for 2009/10 were awaited. The final document would be circulated in mid to late May.

Members were advised that the system for collecting debts had been improved and that better communication was now taking place, including the circulation of weekly reports. This had led to less time being taken by officers to pursue debts. The end of year figures were not yet available so, although the system was now considered to be more robust, it was difficult to judge at the moment how successful it had been.

Time had been spent pursuing old housing debts and writing off those considered uncollectable. As to whether a debt was written off or not often depended on the profile of the debtor and officers advised that the Council could have budgeted better for this, recognising that higher levels of losses should be expected in this service area. It was felt that the volume of write offs should not be regarded as a fair way to measure the Council's performance in this area. Housing debts were now being managed differently with regular reports being made widely available and performance was beginning to improve.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the draft Annual Governance Statement 2009/10 be approved; and
- b) any amendments incorporated into the final version be sent to Members of the Standards and Governance Committee for information prior to the Policy and Organisation Board meeting in June 2010.

58. STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

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

Members were advised that the issue of training on the Gypsy and Traveller Community would be covered in the Borough Solicitor's Member Training report to the Committee on 15 July 2010.

RESOLVED: That the Workplan be received.

59. VOTE OF THANKS

Members of the Committee thanked the Chairman for his chairmanship during the Municipal Year. The Chairman in turn thanked the Members of the Committee for their work and support.

The meeting commenced at 6.00pm and concluded at 6.35 p.m.

CHAIRMAN

