

A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

WAS HELD ON 20 MARCH 2008

Councillors Carr (P), Kimber (P), Langdon (P), Smith, Wright (P) and Mrs Wright (P)

Independent Members: Mr R V Perry (P), vacancy.

41. APOLOGIES

An apology for inability to attend the meeting was received on behalf of Councillor Smith.

42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

43. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards and Governance Committee held on 17 January 2008 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

44. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations.

45. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

46. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Internal Audit and Risk Assurance that outlined the current position of risk management within the Council.

In answer to Members' questions, the Head of Internal Audit and Risk Assurance gave a brief outline of the way in which the Covalent system, referred to in paragraph 2.1 of his report, would be adapted to provide an on-line risk management system for the Borough. The live working site also referred to in paragraph 2.1 was Winchester City Council and officers would be undertaking training and study Winchester's use of the system. It was anticipated that Gosport Borough Council would be able to minimise some of the problems that could be encountered in changing to Covalent by learning from the experiences of officers at Winchester City Council.

A Member queried whether officer time should be allocated to Eastleigh Borough Council when paragraph 3.1 of the report referred to a potential threat to risk management if

insufficient officer time was available. It was confirmed that responsibility for risk management had been passed to the Financial Services Manager. It was also confirmed that he was fully trained in this key area of work.

RESOLVED: That agreement be given to the delayed proposed amendment to the risk management principles for the forthcoming year.

47. INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2008-2009

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Internal Audit and Risk Assurance which provided the Committee with the planned annual coverage of Internal Audit resources for 2008-2009.

It was confirmed that it would be necessary to outsource an IT Audit specialist, as referred to in paragraph 2.2 of the report, as this was a specialist area of work and Gosport Borough Council did not have a member of staff with the necessary technical skill.

RESOLVED: That agreement be given without amendment to the 2008-2009 Internal Audit Plan as attached at Appendix One to the report of the Head of Internal Audit and Risk Assurance.

48. STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

Consideration was given to the Standards and Governance Committee Workplan.

The Borough Solicitor reported that she had been unable to bring a report to the Committee on the new Regulations and Guidance on Standards as they had not yet been published. She was expecting the Regulations to be available on the 24th April and would bring a report to the Committee as soon as possible.

In answer to a Member's question, it was confirmed that the Member/Officer Protocol was a Gosport Borough Council document and any breach would be dealt with internally without the need for referral to the Standards Board.

Members suggested that the dates of some of the Work Areas were no longer realistic as the Plan indicated a number of items to be completed by 24 April 2008. The Borough Solicitor advised that she would bring an amended Plan, showing revised dates and with completed items ticked, to the next meeting of the Committee. She pointed out that when the Plan had been devised she had not known that the regime for dealing with complaints would be changed.

RESOLVED: That an amended Workplan be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

**49. CHAIRMAN'S URGENT ITEM
INDEPENDENT MEMBERS FORUM - EASTBOURNE**

By reason of special circumstances, the Chairman determined that this item be considered at this meeting notwithstanding the fact that the item had not been available for public inspection in accordance with the provisions of Section 100B(4)(a) of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.

The special circumstances were created by the fact that the Chairman wished to draw Members' attention to the discussions which took place at the Independent Members' Forum held in Eastbourne on 11 March 2008.

Consideration was given to the Chairman's report which noted the current position on Standards and Governance matters as reported at the above Forum.

Members discussed the difficulties that Gosport Borough Council would face in appointing the number of Independent Members required to service the expected four stage complaints procedure comprising referrals, assessments, re-assessments (if necessary) and appeals. The cost of such procedures would also have a significant impact on a small authority such as Gosport. It had been suggested that authorities should share Independent Members and appoint a dedicated officer to service the complaints procedures for each participating authority. The Borough Solicitor confirmed that there was to be a meeting of Monitoring Officers on 11 April 2008 and she would put forward Gosport Borough Council's willingness to co-operate with other authorities in Hampshire. However, she considered it would be unwise to share resources with an authority with parish councils as these could generate a considerable amount of work making such a partnership uneconomic for Gosport.

It was confirmed that no additional funds would be forthcoming from central government to cover the costs of the new complaints procedure and it was not possible to predict the amount of work it would generate. It was suggested that mediation could be a less onerous procedure to follow but the Borough Solicitor advised that the new legislation made no mention of a mediation process. Complaints may come from members of the public and they may be unwilling to go through a mediation process. Although the Regulations and Guidance on the new legislation was not yet available, the process would be a more formal, evidence based procedure than the current Complaints Procedure operated by the Council. The sanctions available were far greater as a Councillor could be suspended for a period of up to 6 months.

The Chairman thanked Members for their contributions to the discussion.

RESOLVED: That the Chairman's report on the current position on Standards and Governance matters, as reported at the Independent Members' Forum held on 11 March 2008, be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.00pm and concluded at 6.26pm.

CHAIRMAN