

A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

WAS HELD ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2008

Councillors Burgess (P), Mrs Cully (P), Gill (P), Hicks (P), Langdon (P) and Wright (P).

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

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Mr Richard Perry be elected Chairman of the Standards and Governance Committee for the Municipal Year 2008/09.

2. APOLOGIES

No apologies for inability to attend the meeting were received.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards and Governance Committee held on 24 April 2008 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

5. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations.

6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

PART II

7. REPORT TO THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE 2007/08

The external auditor's report was introduced by Mr Michael Attenborough-Cox of Mazars.

Mr Attenborough-Cox advised that the report followed the audit of the Borough's accounts in line with Audit Commission practice. ISA 260 required that any findings be reported to those

charged with governance.

Members were advised that there had been no significant findings although there were some minor technical matters to be dealt with. An unqualified audit opinion would be issued at the end of September 2008. A Value for Money opinion on Use of Resources would also be issued.

A mis-statement had been identified relating to a payment by the Ministry of Defence which had subsequently been corrected.

The Letter of Representation was required to be signed by the Borough Treasurer 24 hours before the accounts were signed off.

Mr Attenborough-Cox expressed his thanks to officers and paid tribute to their teamwork.

An amendment to the second paragraph of the Letter of Representation was identified in that the words in brackets in the second paragraph should read:

“and, where appropriate, by inspection of supporting documentation”

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the report of the external auditors (Mazars) to those charged with governance for 2007/08 be noted;
- b) the Letter of Representation for the 2006/2007 audit be approved, subject to the amendment above, for signing by the Deputy Chief Executive and Borough Treasurer; and
- c) Mazars and officers be thanked for their work and contributions to the report.

8. LOCAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA AND OTHER PROCEDURAL MATTERS

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Solicitor which proposed criteria to aid the Assessment Sub-Committee and the Review Sub-Committee in deciding how to assess a complaint and to deal with other procedural matters.

With regard to the appointment of sub-committees, the Borough Solicitor explained that Members with a personal interest, as defined in the Code of Conduct, should not take part in the assessment of a complaint. Hitherto the Borough Solicitor had contacted the Chairman to discuss membership of any sub-committee and this guidance had been taken into account. Members agreed that this arrangement should continue.

With regard to anonymous complaints, Members were advised that a balance would have to be struck as there was a difference between an anonymous complaint and a frivolous one. Should an anonymous complaint be of a serious nature, it would have to be investigated.

With regard to the issue of confidentiality, the Borough Solicitor advised that all paperwork relating to complaints was locked away and officers were not permitted to discuss them. Arrangements could be made, if required, for paperwork to be returned to officers and shredded following a sub-committee meeting.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the criteria for assessing complaints about Member conduct set out in the report and Appendix 1 be approved;
- b) the Monitoring Officer arrange for the criteria for assessment and the procedures to be followed to be published on the Council's website and, subject to the Coastline Editorial Panel's approval, published in Coastline;
- c) the current arrangements used hitherto for appointing Members to Assessment or Review Sub-Committees, as detailed in paragraph 2.7 of the Borough Solicitor's report, be continued; and
- d) the Procedural matters set out in the report and in Appendix 1 be approved.

9. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES AND ANALYSIS

Consideration was given to a report of the Corporate Services Manager which recommended that the Committee, having given due consideration to the contents of the report, provide feedback as appropriate to the Council Management Team on the management of the formal complaints received in 2007/8.

Members were advised that there appeared to be a large increase in the volume of complaints received but this was due to the fact that 41 separate complaints had been lodged regarding one issue at Little Green.

Appendix B of the report indicated no significant trends, the main areas generating complaints being Housing, Refuse Collection and Grounds Maintenance. Appendix D to the report indicated satisfaction with the Council's complaints process.

Members gave their approval to the Corporate Services Manager's report and agreed that this be fed back to the Council Management Team.

RESOLVED: That the report of the Corporate Services Manager be approved and that this be fed back to the Council Management Team.

10. INTERNAL AUDIT – PROGRESS REPORT FROM 1ST APRIL 2008 TO 31ST JULY 2008

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Internal Audit and Risk Assurance which

contained details of the performance of the Internal Audit Section in the first four months of 2008/09 (1st April 2008 – 31st July 2008) against the agreed audit plan to the Members with responsibility for governance, together with an update on other key internal audit business within that same period.

Reference was made to minor issues mentioned in paragraph 2.3.1 of the report. Members were advised that these were minor staff issues relating to flexibility which were being dealt with.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the review by the Committee of Internal Audit from April – July 2008 be concluded; and
- b) The Head of Internal Audit's other key business during this period be noted.

11. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN: ANNUAL LETTER 2007/08

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Solicitor which advised the Committee of the Annual Letter 2007/08 received from the Local Government Ombudsman.

Members noted that there had been no findings on maladministration against the Council during 2007/08 and that two fewer complaints to the Ombudsman had been made than in 2006/07.

RESOLVED: That the report of the Borough Solicitor be noted.

12. STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

Consideration was given to the Standards and Governance Committee Workplan which was presented to Members by the Borough Solicitor.

The Borough Solicitor advised Members that some of the items contained in the Workplan had slipped and this was due to the workload generated by complaints received regarding Councillor conduct and which had necessitated the setting up and administration of a number of Assessment Sub-Committees.

Members agreed with a proposal made by the Borough Solicitor that a paper be presented to the next meeting of the Committee containing new dates and any additional items.

The Chairman asked whether any new advice from the Standards Board for England was expected. The Borough Solicitor advised that no advice was imminent but, should any be forthcoming, this would be forwarded to Members via the Members' Information Bulletin and also to the Chairman.

RESOLVED: That a paper be presented to the next meeting of the Committee containing

new dates and any additional items.

The meeting commenced at 6.00pm and concluded at 6.48 pm.

CHAIRMAN