

**A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
WAS HELD ON 30 OCTOBER 2008**

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

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

Also in attendance was Councillor Forder, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

13. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Mr Gerard Lidgey be elected Vice-Chairman of the Standards and Governance Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2008/09.

14. APOLOGIES

No apologies for inability to attend the meeting were received.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

16. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards and Governance Committee held on 11 September 2008 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

17. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations.

18. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

PART II

19. NEW MEMBER INDUCTION AND TRAINING

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Solicitor which advised the Committee of the outcome of a scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the 2008 New

Members Induction and Training.

Councillor Forder, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, was invited to address the Committee. He advised that the recommendations contained in the report reflected the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's views as to how the induction of new Councillors could be improved. The review had been carried out by the whole Committee and the resultant document had received unanimous support.

Members supported the recommendations contained in the report and were advised that, should they be approved, a review would need to be held, in consultation with Group Leaders, to ascertain what immediate training or induction requirements new Members may have. It was agreed that a further report would be submitted to the Standards and Governance Committee in approximately 12 months time once a new package had been agreed with Group Leaders.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the report and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted as set out below and that the Chief Executive be asked to take these into account when formulating further training and induction:
 - 1. Councillors be equipped with the full staff contact list immediately;
 - 2. new Members receive a paper copy of the induction pack previously only available electronically in 2008;
 - 3. in their first two weeks of office, Councillors be given the opportunity to visit Streetscene, be introduced to key individuals and have the organisation's role explained;
 - 4. Councillors be given earlier access to the Council's Information Technology (IT) infrastructure;
 - 5. Councillors be provided with IT training opportunities to enable them to take advantage of the IT infrastructure with training on setting up websites occurring early on; and
 - 6. formal induction occasions be expanded and their focus altered. Session(s) to possibly include:
 - (i) existing Councillors explaining their role, activities, successes and frustrations with advice to the naïve and unwary;
 - (ii) the challenges and opportunities that Gosport provides and a description of existing local initiatives;

- (iii) clarification of what the Borough Council has to do and chooses to do;
- (iv) the purpose of the Code of Conduct and its role in facilitating Councillors' work;
- (v) a practical introduction to the Council Chamber and what occurs during Council meetings;
- (vi) a basic guide to the Council's standing orders and procedures followed during meetings; and

- b) a further report be submitted to the Committee in approximately twelve months time.

20. INTERNAL AUDIT – PROGRESS REPORT FROM 1 APRIL 2008 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2008

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Internal Audit and Risk Assurance which advised the Committee of the performance of the Internal Audit Section in the first six months of 2008/09 (1 April 2008 – 30 September 2008) against the agreed audit plan to the Members with responsibility for governance.

Members were advised that the six-monthly position was encouraging and it was expected that the Audit Plan would be delivered successfully and on time. Tasks had been assigned to individual officers of the Internal Audit Section. The Section was currently carrying a vacancy but it was anticipated that the post would be filled shortly.

In answer to a Member's question, the Borough Treasurer confirmed that the Council had no investments with the Icelandic banks and advised that the Council had significant funds invested pending use for funding the Capital Programme. In view of the current difficulties with financial markets, finance staff were managing investments in a restricted (low risk) way within the strategy approved by Council and it was likely that the investment strategy for 2009/10 recommended to Council in February 2009 would be significantly restrictive compared to previous years.

The issue of complaints about the grounds maintenance service was raised. Members were advised that Internal Audit would be concerned with the level of complaints but would not normally investigate specific individual complaints about the service.

RESOLVED: That the review of the performance of Internal Audit from 1 April 2008 to 30 September 2008 be concluded.

21. STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Solicitor which advised Members of progress on the Committee's Workplan.

Members were advised that additional work had been required to be undertaken due to the introduction of Local Assessment and Investigation of Complaints. It was felt that the Workplan should reflect this additional workload and it was suggested that the Borough Solicitor report twice yearly to the Committee on this area of work, the first report being in January 2009 and the second in September 2009.

The Borough Solicitor suggested that it would be advisable to move forward with Member training on the investigation of complaints and that a training session could be arranged in January 2009 and advised that Hart District Council had expressed an interest in sharing such training and therefore costs could be shared.

A lack of resources had meant that the areas of work related to Member/Officer Protocols and Contract Standing Orders had not progressed as anticipated. Currently amendments to the Code of Conduct for Members and a revised Code of Conduct for Officers were subject to consultation which was due to be completed on Christmas Eve. Officers considered it advisable to await the results of the consultation before revising the Member/Officer Protocol. Accordingly a report would be made to the Committee in July 2009 on this matter.

Work was currently being undertaken by the Chief Finance Officers across Hampshire on rationalising Procurement Strategies and Contract Standing Orders to facilitate partnership working. It was felt that the outcome of this work should be awaited before progressing with the review of the Council's Contract Standing Orders.

With regard to joint working, Members were advised that the Council, having now introduced its own systems, had withdrawn from the Hampshire Marketplace. With regard to joint waste collection, the Gosport Borough Council service was already the cheapest in Hampshire.

Members raised the issue of complaints about Councillors. It was felt that a number of those made in Gosport had been unnecessary as they were either "tit-for-tat" or politically motivated. However, it was clear that the Council still had a duty to assess and investigate such complaints.

It was agreed that the proposed joint training with Hart District Council should be arranged.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the revised Workplan be approved; and
- b) training on the investigation of complaints be arranged in January 2009 and shared training with Hart District Council be further explored.

22. HAMPSHIRE, ISLE OF WIGHT, EAST SUSSEX, WEST SUSSEX AND SURREY INDEPENDENT MEMBERS' FORUM – FAREHAM, 23 OCTOBER 2008

Consideration was given to a report of the Chairman, Mr Perry, which provided details of the seventh Annual Assembly of the Standards Board for England held on 13/14 October 2008

which had been tabled at the above Forum meeting in Fareham on 23 October 2008. Members were advised of the of future likely events as set out in Appendix A of the report including:

- amendment regulations in November 2008 allowing Standards Committees of different Councils to work together, and to remedy difficulties in recruiting independent members
- review by the Government of the newly introduced Code of Conduct, with consultations on closing on Christmas Eve 2008
- increasing pressure for Standards Committees to become more involved in matters such as oversight of standards in local partnerships. A protocol had been issued the day after the recent national conference at Birmingham
- increasing pressure for a more proactive stance by Standards Committees
- proposals for regular six-monthly meetings between the Chair of the Standards Committee, Council CEO and Leader, revolving around increasing Standards Committees' profiles

The Chairman was thanked for his report and the update contained therein.

RESOLVED: That the Chairman's report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.00pm and concluded at 6.45pm.

CHAIRMAN