

**A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
WAS HELD ON 21 JULY 2009**

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

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

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

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Mr R Perry be appointed Chairman of the Committee for the Municipal Year 2009/10.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Mr G Lidgey be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the Municipal Year 2009/10.

3. APOLOGIES

An apology for inability to attend the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Cully.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards and Governance Committee held on 23 April 2009 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

6. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations.

7. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

PART II

8. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW 2008/09

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Solicitor which advised the Committee of

the Annual Review 2008/09 received from the Local Government Ombudsman.

Members were advised that the Council's own internal complaints procedure was working well and there had been no findings of maladministration against the Council for a number of years.

The question of possible compensation payments acting as an inducement to complain was raised. Officers advised that generally the compensation sums recommended by the Ombudsman were comparatively small and there was little media coverage.

The Chairman congratulated officers on their improved response times to Ombudsman enquiries.

Members were advised that the offer of training by the Ombudsman's office would be looked into later in the year. The Ombudsman was about to issue a fresh good practice guide and training would be more useful if it tied in with this.

It was noted that the Local Government Ombudsman, Jerry White, would be retiring on 30 September 2009. The Chairman requested that a letter be written to him conveying the Council's best wishes.

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

9. INTERNAL AUDIT – PROGRESS REPORT FROM 1ST APRIL 2009 TO 30TH JUNE 2009

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Internal Audit & Risk Assurance which tabled the performance of the Internal Audit Section in the first three months of 2009/10 (1st April 2009 – 30th June 2009) against the agreed audit plan to the Members with responsibility for governance and provided Members with an update on other key internal audit business within the same period.

The question of the low number of contingency days remaining for the remainder of the Financial Year was raised. Officers advised that this was due to work undertaken solely by the Internal Audit Section on Year 3 service reviews whereas Years 1 and 2 work had been carried out using other resources.

It was reported that the resignation of the Principal Auditor had been received. Although the post would have to be reviewed as part of the normal process, officers stressed that it was an important post within the organisation and would need to be filled, particularly as the Head of Internal Audit & Risk Assurance was required to spend time in Eastleigh under the partnership arrangement.

Members were advised that the fully electronic working paper audit process being developed by the Isle of Wight Council would be marketed free of charge to Gosport Borough Council. It was important that the Internal Audit Section moved towards this way of working which

would also be of considerable benefit to the partnership arrangement with Eastleigh Borough Council.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the strong performance of the Internal Audit Section in the first three months of 2009/10 to the 30th June 2009 be noted; and
- b) the update and current status of the internal audit partnership with Eastleigh Borough Council be noted.

10. USE OF RESOURCES - UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Borough Treasurer which advised the Committee of changes to the Use of Resources (UoR) test and recommended an appropriate response.

The Borough Treasurer reported that a score at level 2 was expected in the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) UoR test. Previously the Council had been approaching a score of level 3 but the bar had now been raised.

Under the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) arrangements the UoR tests had been widened to include new areas such as the management of natural resources and workforce management.

Although it was expected that Gosport would achieve an overall level of 2 in 2008/9 (meeting the basic expected level) there were likely to be some areas within this that were weak and would struggle or fail to meet the basic standard.

Capacity and resources continued to be an issue and, whilst some areas exhibited qualities of “performing well” with potential for scoring at level 3; Council Management Team considered that priority should be given to consolidating at least the “basic” standard across the board.

The Council's external auditors would shortly be providing feedback which would be included in their Annual Letter.

Members were advised that there may be a case for setting up a sub-committee which would be a more appropriate body than the Standards and Governance Committee to deal with detailed external audit reports.

With regard to the Council's whistleblowing policy, officers advised of the need to ensure public awareness and work would be taking place in this area.

With regard to officer training in ethics, it was expected that any training would cover:

- The role of officers and who they serve
- Member/officer relationship
- Anti-fraud and corruption policies
- Whistleblowing

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the action plan be approved in order to seek to consolidate a score of at least 2 in all key lines of enquiry within the new comprehensive area assessment use of resources test;
- b) the future actions that will further improve performance in 2010/11 and beyond be noted; and
- c) progress be monitored at six monthly intervals.

11. STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

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

It was agreed that the Borough Solicitor's report on Local Assessment Monitoring be moved back from 10 September to 29 October 2009.

With regard to New Member Induction, the Borough Solicitor's report in October would include details of the New Members Information Pack and the recommendations made by the Standards and Governance Committee on 30 October 2008.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the Borough Solicitor's report on Local Assessment Monitoring be moved back from 10 September to 29 October 2009; and
- b) the Workplan be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.00pm and concluded at 6.30 p.m.

CHAIRMAN