

City of Durham

At a Meeting of the **STANDARDS COMMITTEE** held in the Town Hall, Durham, on Tuesday, 26th September, 2006, at 4.00 p.m.

Present: Mr B.R.J. Ingleby (in the Chair)
and Councillors Moderate, and Simpson (City Council Members)
and Mr D. Hollingworth and Mrs T. Naples (Independent Members).

268. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gibbon and Parish Councillor Beswick.

269. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meetings held on 10th July, 2006, and 18th July, 2006, were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Report of Monitoring Officer

270. PARISH REPRESENTATIVE VACANCY

At the request of Members of the Standards Committee, the Monitoring Officer had written to all 15 Parish Clerks, inviting expressions of interest in the parish representative vacancy.

To date, 4 expressions of interest had been received. These were as follows:-

- (a) Framwellgate Moor Parish Council – Councillor Veronica Winter
(Former Chair of the Parish Council, and a Magistrate)
- (b) Belmont Parish Council – Councillor Walter Meikle
(Chairman of the Parish Council)
- (c) Witton Gilbert Parish Council – Councillor Hilary Westwell
(Formerly a District Councillor)
- (d) Croxdale & Hett Parish Council – Councillor Joseph Anderson
(Formerly a District Councillor, and now an Honorary Alderman)

Resolved: That the City Council be advised that all nominees were acceptable to the Standards Committee.

271. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The request from the Standards Committee that consideration be given by the City Council to extending its terms of reference was considered by Full Council at its Meeting on 12th September, 2006. Mr Ingleby, Chairman of the Standards Committee, was in attendance and spoke in support of the request.

Following Mr Ingleby's presentation, the Leader moved that no further action should be taken on the request. He indicated that he had looked at the issue long and hard and did not dispute the advice of the Standards Board that consideration be given to extending terms of reference of Standards Committees. Nevertheless, he was concerned that there should not be duplication and confusion with the terms of reference of the Audit Overview Committee. The City Council was one of the first local authorities to set up an Audit Overview Committee and he queried whether those local authorities that had now extended the terms of reference

of their Standards Committees may well not have had an Audit Overview Committee at the time.

Councillor Syer had then moved an amendment. He suggested it was for the Standards Committee themselves to decide whether there was sufficient capacity to take on extra work. As a compromise, his amendment suggested that the terms of reference in question were split between the Standards Committee and the Audit Overview Committee. He was of the view that there should be consultation with the Standards Committee on a proposed split of these duties and a report back to Full Council.

The amendment on being put to the Meeting was declared lost. The substantive motion of the Leader that there be no further action on the request was then put to the Meeting and carried.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

272. ETHICAL GOVERNANCE AUDIT

At the last Meeting of the Standards Committee, it was agreed that this issue would be placed on the Agenda for this Meeting, and that in the meantime, Members would contact the Monitoring Officer with suggestions for amendments to the form of questionnaire which was proposed.

Since the last Meeting, comments had only been received from Mrs Naples:-

- She supported the proposal to carry out an Ethical Standards Audit, and suggested that the target population be confined to items 1-3 of the Appendix to the Monitoring Officer's report to the Meeting on 18th July, 2006
- Question 1 should be rewritten to take away the leading nature of the question
- An additional question should be included enquiring whether the Standards Committee received enough active support and encouragement from Members
- There should be an additional column for respondees to indicate 'don't know' or 'not applicable'. This could be sited on the right of the comments column. It was a very different answer to not at all, and the number of don't knows would be very revealing
- Were Independent Members included in the target population?

In light of Mrs Naples' comments, the Monitoring Officer had amended the questionnaire and this was circulated for Members' approval.

It was originally suggested that the target population to whom the questionnaire should be sent would be:-

- (a) A random sample of 15% of the Council's workforce
- (b) All City Council Members
- (c) The County council and all Parish Councils
- (d) Stakeholders
- (e) Members of the public

If Members wished to adopt Mrs Naples' suggestions, the latter two categories would be omitted, and Members views were sought.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that Independent Members were included in the questionnaire which was sent to all City Council Members last time the audit was carried out, and proposed the same applied to this audit.

A draft of the letter which would accompany the questionnaire was also circulated.

Resolved: (i) That the Ethical Governance Audit now proceed.

(ii) That the questionnaire, as amended, be approved.

(iii) That the questionnaire be despatched to:-

- (a) A random sample (15%) of the Council's workforce
- (b) All City Council Members including co-opted Members
- (c) The County Council and all Parish Councils

(iv) Professor Alan Lawton of Teesside University be asked to validate the responses to the questionnaire

(v) That a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Standards Committee when the responses to the audit had been collated and validated.

Note: *Councillor Moderate left the Meeting at 4.40 p.m.*

273. ANNUAL REVIEW OF STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND 2005/06

A copy of the Standards Board annual review for the municipal year 2005/06 was circulated.

It was encouraging to note that the Standards Board had said that local authorities were taking greater ownership of the ethical agenda and that this was becoming embedded at a local level. The work of individual Standards Committees in this area was vital and was commended.

The Standards Board had also indicated that, having embarked on extensive consultation on the Code of Conduct, they were hoping a new Code would be in place as soon as possible, and were working with the Government to get the details right.

So far as key performance targets were concerned, the Standards Board had indicated that complaints were now turned around very quickly, and they were completing 90% of cases within 6 months.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

274. STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND – BULLETINS 29 AND 30

Copies of the latest bulletins from the Standards Board for England were circulated for Members' information.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

The meeting terminated at 5.00 p.m.

Chairman