

## **THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET**

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held in Conference Room No.3, Civic Centre, Newcastle Road, Chester-le-Street on Thursday 30 June 2005 at 4.00pm.

### PRESENT:

Mr D Fisher (Independent Member and Chairman), Mr M Dulieu (Parish Councillor), Councillor C Carr and Councillor W Laverick.

Officers: C Potter (Monitoring Officer), A Swinney (Head of Organisational Development) and S Marshall (Democratic Services Assistant).

### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Mr M Graham, Miss V G McEwan, Reverend E Davidson and Councillor J J Evans.

### **2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 31 MARCH 2005**

RESOLVED: "That the minutes of the proceedings of the Meeting of the Committee held 31 March 2005, copies of which had previously been circulated to each Member, be confirmed as being a correct record."

The Chairman proceeded to sign the Minutes.

### **3 MATTERS ARISING**

Councillor Laverick queried if any funding had been agreed for Members to attend the Annual Standards Board Conference.

The Monitoring Officer advised that work was in progress regarding training budgets but that no firm decisions had yet been made. He also advised that arrangements had been requested to be made for the number of delegates to attend the annual conference. Confirmation would be sought.

RESOLVED: "That this matter be noted."

### **4 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

### **5 SPEAK OUT POLICY**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development recommending a range of revisions to the policy used for employees to raise any serious concerns they have about any aspect of the Council's work.

The Head of Organisational Development outlined the main points of the report and advised that research had been gathered on current recommended best practice in regard to whistle blowing policies from a number of relevant sources including benchmarking our policy against those of other authorities.

The Chairman expressed his concern at the high percentage given in a recent survey carried out by PriceWaterhouse Coopers on corporate fraud which found that 84% of 233 whistleblowers lost their jobs within a few months of reporting a malpractice.

The Head of Organisational Development advised that there was a need to emphasize to employees that support mechanisms would be in place to protect against potential victimisation of whistle blowers.

Councillor Laverick queried if there had been any instances of whistle blowing within the authority.

Both the Head of Organisational Development and the Monitoring Officer advised that they were not aware of any instances.

The Committee then considered the proposed revisions in the report.

RESOLVED: "That the proposed revisions in the report be supported and approved by the Standards Committee subject to the following amendment:

4.1 4) – That Members of the Audit Team and the Personnel Team and Standards Committee Members are not included in the list of go-betweens."

## **6 A CODE FOR DISTRICT COUNCIL MEMBERS ON GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY**

Consideration was given to the report of the Monitoring Officer recommending the Code for Members on gifts and Hospitality in respect of the District Council.

The Monitoring Officer proceeded to outline the main points in the report.

Mr Dulieu stated that it was important to make Members aware of misrepresentation with regard to the interpretation of what was a gift and what was not.

The Chairman commented that it would be prudent for Members to seek advice on each occasion of being offered a gift.

RESOLVED: "That the Code for Members on Gifts and Hospitality be recommended for adoption by the District Council."

## **7 QUORUM OF STANDARDS MEETINGS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Monitoring Officer advising the Committee on what constitutes a quorum.

RESOLVED: "That the law on the quorum of the Standards Committee and the Council's decision to change the composition of the Standards Committee to increase the representation of Parish Representatives from one to two be noted."

## **8 PUBLIC AWARENESS OF STANDARDS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Monitoring Officer advising the Committee of progress made in promoting public awareness of the role of the Standards Committee.

The Chairman advised that he was willing to prepare a small article for the Autumn edition of the District News.

Councillor Carr suggested that greater emphasis was also given to Parish Councils in the article to be produced for District News as the public needed to be made aware that parish councillors are also accountable.

RESOLVED: "That the recommendations in the report be accepted by the Committee."

## **9 REVIEW OF DISTRICT COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION**

Consideration was given to the report of the Monitoring Officer introducing the new Constitution to Members and recommending that the Committee agree a timetable in its work plan to systematically review each part of the Constitution so as to contribute to the next review of the Constitution scheduled to begin later in the year.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the Constitution had been prepared at such speed that it did not allow as much time for consultation as would have been wished but that this could be done at review stage.

RESOLVED: "That the contents of the report be noted and the Committee adjusts its work plan to carry out a review of the Constitution."

## **10 PERFORMANCE REVIEW – MONITORING OFFICER FUNCTIONS**

The Monitoring Officer advised that there was a requirement within the new Constitution for a report from the Monitoring Officer on Performance Review.

He went on to advise that he had appointed a locum solicitor, initially for a 3 month period, to work 3 days per week supporting the Monitoring Officer in his duties.

The Chairman queried if this appointment had been carried out in accordance with Council practises.

The Monitoring Officer that he had acted under the then delegated powers of Full Council given to the Monitoring Officer and the appointment was lawful.

RESOLVED: "That the contents of the report be noted."

#### **11 DISTRICT COUNCIL PROTOCOL ON USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY BY MEMBERS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Monitoring Officer recommending the adoption of a protocol on the use of Information Technology by Members.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the Council had embarked upon delivery of its E-Government initiative, part of which involved the rolling out of computers to Members.

He went onto advise that although this programme would take some time to be fully implemented, it was important to have a protocol in place so as not to delay the programme's eventual implementation.

RESOLVED: "That the Committee recommend that the District Council adopt the Protocol on the use of Information Technology by Members."

#### **12 LOCAL INVESTIGATIONS OF STANDARDS COMPLAINTS AND LOCAL HEARINGS PROCEDURE**

Consideration was given to the report of the Monitoring Officer recommending a model procedure for local investigations and a procedure for local standards hearings for adoption by the Standards Committee.

The Chairman asked the Committee to consider the recommendations in the report one by one.

RESOLVED: "That the recommendations in the report be agreed by the Committee."

#### **13 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

RESOLVED: " That the next meeting of the Committee be held on Thursday 28 July at 4.00pm in the Civic Centre."

The Meeting terminated at 5.37pm.