

# STANDARDS COMMITTEE

## 6 MARCH 2009

*Present :-* Mr D. Coe (Independent Member) Chairman  
Mr Andrews (Independent Member)  
Mr Bartier (Parish Council Representative)  
Mrs Brown (Parish Council Representative)  
Councillor Chapman  
Ms Eden (Parish Council Representative)  
Mr Farmer (Independent Member)  
Mr Fitton (Deputy Chairman) (Independent Member)  
Councillor Gamble  
Councillor Spyvee

### 11. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2008 were confirmed as a correct record subject to the second sentence in the first bullet point in minute 9 being amended to read:-

*“However, the answer to question one needed to be amended to clarify the point that the Code needed to cover any behaviour that was criminal at the time it was committed, whether it resulted in a prosecution or not.”*

The Monitoring Officer reported that the Standards Board was preparing draft regulations to allow the Standards Board to suspend the initial assessment functions of an authority, enable authorities to establish joint standards committees and amend the powers of standards committee to grant dispensations to members who would otherwise be unable to take part in authority business because of a prejudicial interest. The regulations were expected to come into force in May 2009.

### 12. Standards Committee Annual Report 2008/2009

The Monitoring Officer presented a report proposing an Annual Report for the Standards Committee for the 2008/09 municipal year. As well as being good practice in terms of governance, an Annual Report would also help raise the profile of the Standards Committee. It was proposed that the Annual Report be submitted to Full Council in April 2009. In view of this timescale delegated authority was sought for the Monitoring Officer to make any necessary changes to the report in consultation with the Chairman to update it to the end of March 2009. The report concentrated largely on the introduction of the Local Assessment of Allegations processes.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the Annual Report would be placed on the Council's website on a new page dedicated to the Standards Committee and the local assessment process. This would again help raise the Committee's profile as well as provide a one stop shop for information about the work of the Committee and the complaints process.

The Committee endorsed the concept of the Annual Report and approved the content of the draft report, subject to the following minor amendments:-

- The second paragraph of the introduction be amended to read:-

*“The Borough Council is required by law to establish a Standards Committee which has an important role to play in providing training for and maintaining ethical conduct of Councillors. Article 9 and Part 3 of the Council’s Constitution contain the requirements for and composition of the Standards Committee.”*

- The first paragraph of section 5.1 be amended to read:-

*“In May 2008 the responsibility for the initial assessment of allegations whether or not councillors had failed to follow the Members Code of Conduct was transferred from the Standards Board for England to local Standards Committees. “*

**RESOLVED** that:-

(a) The Standards Committee Annual Report 2008/2009 be approved, subject to the minor amendments specified above;

(b) The Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman, be authorised to make any necessary changes to the Annual Report to give effect to the Committee’s activities up to the end of March 2009.

**RECOMMENDED** to Council that the Standards Committee Annual Report 2008/09 be noted.

### **13. Local Code of Corporate Governance**

The Monitoring Officer presented a report proposing the draft Local Code of Corporate Governance. The Council had approved a Local Code of Corporate Governance several years ago. The revised Code before the Committee was drafted in accordance with guidance issued in 2007 jointly by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives entitled “Delivering Good Governance in Local Authorities.” It was based on six core principles.

The Committee noted in particular the work that was being done and was proposed to achieve Core Principle Three (“Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour”) which was especially relevant to the work of the Standards Committee.

The Committee welcomed the Code and recommended to Cabinet that it be approved. The Committee noted that if Cabinet approved the Code, it would then be referred to Full Council for adoption.

**RECOMMENDED** to Cabinet that the Local Code of Corporate Governance be approved.

#### **14. Revised Whistleblowing Policy**

The Monitoring Officer presented a report proposing a revised whistleblowing policy. The existing Whistleblowing policy had been in place for approximately ten years, and was therefore due for review. No complaints had ever been made under the existing policy so it was difficult to assess its adequacy, but it was now good practice to include more information and widen the scope of whistleblowing policies. The most important introduction in the new policy was arrangements for whistleblowing by persons other than employees.

The Committee welcomed the updated policy and considered that if approved and adopted by Council that arrangements should be put in place for the revised policy to be disseminated and publicised to all staff and contractors. The Committee also considered that it should be drawn to the attention of Town and Parish Councils with a recommendation that they consider adopting it. The Council should also hold an exercise to test the policy.

*RECOMMENDED* to Council that the revised Whistleblowing policy be approved and adopted.

*RESOLVED* that if the revised Whistleblowing policy be approved by Council that:-

- (i) the Whistleblowing policy be circulated to all staff and contractors employed by the Council;
- (ii) the Whistleblowing policy be drawn to the attention of Town and Parish Councils with a recommendation that they consider adopting it;
- (iii) an exercise be held to test the policy.

#### **15. Standards Committee Work Programme 2008/09 and 2009/10**

The Committee received a report updating the Committee's work programme for 2008/09 and 2009/10. The Committee considered that the review of training for members on the code of conduct and local assessment should be brought forward to the meeting on 11 September 2009.

*RESOLVED* that the Standards Committee Work Programme 2008/09 and 2009/10 be approved, subject to the item on review of training for members being moved to the meeting on 11 September 2009.