

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**7 March 2007  
(6.00pm – 7.39pm)

**PRESENT:** Councillors Dryden, Hymans, McPherson, C Rosenstiel, Stebbings, Taylor (Chair).  
External Members: Dr Clark  
Also present – External Member (alternates) Mr Williams, Mr Barrett (reserve External Member)

**FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL****07/s/01 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2006 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**07/s/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Mr Dasgupta (External Member), Mrs English (External Member alternate). Mr Williams arrived for Item 6 onwards.

**07/s/03 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

**07/s/04 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No members of the public were present.

**07/s/05 PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL**

The Best Value & Performance Manager introduced the report. The statutory General BVPI survey took place every three years, and this was the third cycle. 5000 households were chosen randomly, and 1600 returns were received. It gave a +/-2% accurate representation for the whole population; however, as it was just a snapshot view, it would need to be viewed with other research. As it was a national survey, comparisons could be made with other councils. Single and upper tier authority information was available at present, and more detailed information was to follow from MRUK, e.g. for ethnicity, age and gender.

The officer elaborated on points in the report, as follows:

3.1) The figure for Housing appeared low for satisfaction as this service was not used by the majority; of the respondents only 25% had used Planning or Housing.

3.5) The disparity between perception of efficiency and value for money was probably due to the former being linked to thinking about how services were run, and the latter being linked to thinking about levels of council tax.

3.8) The increase in contact with the Council via email or the internet was large at 18%, up from 3% three years ago. This was due to the Council encouraging internet usage; the new Customer Service Strategy would also encourage online transactions.

3.9) The levels of satisfaction of the public that had contacted the Council was pleasing, as the Council had done a lot of work in this area.

Members made the following comments and asked questions to which others responded (A):

- Was the public aware what proportion of council tax actually went to the Council?  
A: The BVP summary included a breakdown of the various elements of council tax, and this was in a leaflet sent to households.
- The survey would not be very indicative if a lot of student households were chosen.  
A: The officer agreed to look into issues surrounding disproportionate ratios of students.
- There was a large proportion of rented accommodation in Cambridge  
A: Households were selected randomly from the postal address file, so it wasn't known beforehand if these were rented or private. However, there was a question in the survey regarding tenure and information from this could be used as a category for breakdown.
- It would be good to see any comparative figures for satisfaction with contact with the Council from previous years' surveys.
- Could future survey reports include the percentage of people who expressed dissatisfaction with service areas or who did not know what their view was on services alongside the satisfaction figures?  
A: Yes this could be done.

#### **07/s/06 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC HEALTH BILL – IMPLICATIONS FOR STANDARDS COMMITTEES**

The Head of Legal & Democratic Services explained that the Bill made it possible for a Panel or Standards Committee to conclude that a councillor had brought his or her office into disrepute by their behaviour in their private life. The Bill provided for individual local standards committees of authorities to take on the role currently exercised by the Standards Board for England of conducting the initial assessment of allegations of misconduct. The Standards Committee would have options to refer allegations to the Council's monitoring officer or to the Standards Board, or to take no action in respect of a complaint and to give written notification and reasons to the complainant. The complainant was then entitled to request a review. Standards Committees should be chaired by an external member and not by a councillor. The Bill would also pass responsibility for considering requests from senior council officers for exemption from political restriction to the Standards Committee.

#### **07/s/07 REVISED MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT: CONSULTATION**

The Head of Legal & Democratic Services elaborated on the Officer comments in the report. Members asked questions and made comments. The Committee amended or amplified the officers' comments as follows:

- With regards to the disclosure of confidential information at 4.3 of the report, one point not addressed by this part of the code is whether an item has been properly classified as confidential by a council in the first place;
- The Committee was divided on whether the relaxation of the Code to allow a councillor with a prejudicial interest to address a meeting in a personal capacity should go further and allow members with a prejudicial interest to remain in the room to hear the debate (but not vote or take part further in the debate) after they had made their representations. Some members of the Committee felt this was appropriate, as it put members on the same footing, so far as possible, with ordinary members of the public. Other members of the committee felt that the risk of the member's continued presence in the room putting pressure on other members was too great.

The Committee agreed that the officers' comments, as amended or amplified by the Committee, should be passed on to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

#### **07/s/08 REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

The Director of Central Services explained that this was part of the ethical governance framework.

Members made the following comments and asked questions to which others responded (A):

- With regards to (f) on page 59, the goals and effectiveness of training should be evaluated, in terms of what was trying to be achieved and also the effect on the trainee's performance.
  - A: The officer would pass these comments onto the Corporate Management Team. There should be training in interviewing for members involved in recruiting.
- Regarding page 50, there needed to be more measurable objectives. More publicity should be given to area committee meetings and the opportunity these presented for the public to become involved.
  - A: The officer would relay this to the Head of Strategy & Partnerships.

#### **07/s/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday 13 June 2007 at 6pm.

The meeting closed at 7.39pm.

**Chair**