

STANDARDS COMMITTEE17 June 2009
(6.00pm – 7.15pm)**PRESENT:** Councillors Bick, Dryden, McGovern, and Taylor

External Members: Dr Clark (Chair), Mr A Dasgupta

FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**09/s/8 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR**

Members agreed to elect Dr A Clark as Chair and Mr A Dasgupta as Vice Chair for 2009/10.

09/s/9 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

09/s/10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Stuart, Cllr McPherson and from External Member Mr Williams.

09/s/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Agenda item	Interest
None		

09/s/12 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No members of the public were present.

09/s/13 ANNUAL REPORT ON PREVENTION OF FRAUD & CORRUPTION POLICY

The Principal Auditor introduced the item and explained the policy. The Chair invited members to comment on the item. The Head of Revenue Services stated

that their software linked together the rent and Housing Benefits systems. The software informed officers immediately if there was a discrepancy in information and that investigations should be made.

Cllr McGovern referred to the last sentence of paragraph 5.1 and stated that he was concerned with the appropriateness of some of the initiatives and suggested that the word 'appropriate' be added within the sentence to read as follows:

'The Council is also committed to participating in any *appropriate* Central Government led fraud initiatives.'

The Principal Auditor agreed for the additional word to be added.

A Member queried whether any oversight, if any, should be given to the policy referred to at paragraph 2.16. The Chief Executive stated that staff were given reassurance of the confidential reporting policy system. The policy did not prescribe a single route of reporting issues but allowed for issues to be raised directly with Members. The Chief Executive also explained that details of all allegations received are provided to the Monitoring Officer, so this allows for an overview of allegations made under the Confidential Reporting Policy.

Cllr Dryden asked whether the higher number of allegations than investigations for this year was due to staff cuts. The Head of Revenue Services explained that they had undergone a restructure which involved looking at all the service areas. However the number of investigations was not in any way a reflection of staffing levels.

There were discussions concerning the mismatches picked up by the software which linked the Housing department to the Benefits department. In response to a question regarding how often mismatches were taken seriously by officers, the Head of Revenue Services stated that officers always looked into mismatches in order to see whether there was a clear indication of error as there tended to be a small number of genuine mistakes. If the mismatch was persistent, then it was passed onto the fraud team. Where the error could not be identified, officers carried out further investigation.

09/s/14 ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER 2007-08: ACTION PLAN

The Performance Manager introduced the report and referred the Committee to Appendix 1 for item number 6 and stated that for the first two months of 2009/10 performance against these indicators had been as follows:

'Major' 83%

'Minor' 89%

'Other' 90%

The Committee were informed that for 'Other' applications 122 out of 135 planning applications had been approved within the 8 week target time. In response to a question requesting the definition of the terms, the Performance Manager stated that 'major' related to large scale residential and industrial development, small scale development related to 'minor' and that she would look into the definition of 'other' and feedback to the Committee in due course.

Resolved

Members agreed to note the actions set out in Appendix A and monitor progress against the areas for improvement through the mid year Service Plan Performance Progress Reports to be compiled in October 2009.

09/s/15 ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT

The Performance Manager introduced the report and discussed the number of complaints responded to on time. In response to Members request for further information regarding the matter, she stated that there had been a 9% decrease in response rates for Environment and Planning as they had encountered an error with the recording system, but it was unclear whether this fully explained the decrease and as a result she would be looking into it.

Members requested that further information on the percentage of FOI requests responded to in time, the average time taken to respond to a request, the number of FOI replies resulting in a request for internal review and a list of the most common themes for FOI requests to be included in the report. The Performance Manager stated that she thought most of this information would be available and would include it in the Report.

Cllr Bick suggested that the City Council's website provide a section on 'feedback' as currently the only way to notify the council was via the complaints form on the website. It was important to distinguish the two words as 'complaint' had a negative connotation. The Chief Executive stated that retaining the singular category of the complaints form was preferable as opposed to having many categories, however she would look into the matter.

In response to a question regarding whether the Council had a system of looking at complaints and compliments to see whether it was falling or improving, the

Chief Executive stated that at present there was a quarterly monitoring report process which went to Departmental Management Teams. Corporate Management Team reviewed the information annually.

There were further discussions concerning FOI requests in which Members asked whether they would be informed if someone requested an FOI regarding their personal matters. The Chief Executive stated that if the question concerned information that was not already available to the public, then Members would be informed.

In regard to a point raised concerning the 'No Barbeque' signs having been agreed at Community Services to be displayed on Jesus Green, the Performance Manager stated that she would look into whether this had been carried out.

Resolved:

The Standards Committee agreed for their comments to be passed on to Civic Affairs.

09/s/16 ANNUAL RETURN TO THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND

The Chief Executive introduced the report. She discussed the issue of openness and accountability and subsequently confirmed that as a new move, Members expenses would be live on the Council website on Friday.

The Committee discussed the Standards Board for England Annual return and commented on the number of negative answers to the questions. The Chief Executive stated that the purpose of putting this item on the agenda was to enable the committee to debate on this year's return and consider how it wishes to programme and develop its work. Mr Dasgupta suggested that the item be put on the next agenda focusing on those areas where the response on this year's return has been negative.

The Ethical Governance Tool Kit was discussed in which the Chief Executive stated that there was already a tool kit from the Standards Board for handling complaints, but she would endeavour to find out more information concerning the Ethical Governance Tool Kit and make it available.

The Chief Executive responded to Members questions regarding member and officer relations by stating that there was a Member/Officer Protocol within the Constitution and officers would ensure that it is highlighted in Members Induction Programme. The guidance was readily available on the intranet. The Democratic

Services Manager was currently looking into how the Members' Training Programme could be better delivered and supported.

There was discussion regarding whether there were any plans to display register of officer gifts and hospitality onto the website. The Democratic Services Manager said there were no current plans to do so but would look into the matter.

Resolution

The Committee agreed to consider the contents of the return and decided to pursue the issue of placing the item on the next agenda as part of its work programme for the year.

09/s/17 CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

The Chair invited the Committee to discuss and comment on the item. The Performance Manager agreed with Members concerns that the Code should have reference to their policy of CCTV to protect privacy as was currently the case for personal data. The Chief Executive commented that the Council had policies to protect personal data under the Investigatory Powers Act.

Resolution

The Standards Committee agreed that the comments on the Corporate Code of Governance be passed on to Civic Affairs.

Members also agreed for any Civic Affairs to note any comments from and agree the Code of Corporate Governance for approval at Full Council on 16th July.

09/s/18

The Chief Executive advised the Committee that she had officially moved into the post of Chief Executive. As legislation prevented the Head of the Paid Service to also be the Monitoring Officer, she was asking Civic Affairs Committee to appoint Simon Pugh as the Monitoring Officer as an interim measure with Jane Connell as Deputy Monitoring Officer. The Chair on behalf of the Committee thanked the Chief Executive for the work she had done in the role of Monitoring Officer.

The Chief Executive also informed the Committee that she had received a complaint which was likely to require convening an Assessment Sub-Committee, they would be contacted about this separately.

Meeting ended at 7.15pm

Chair