

# STANDARDS COMMITTEE

## —Minutes—

**05 OCTOBER 2005**

Present:

Mr. Steven Moussavi (Chair)  
Mr. Christopher Troke  
Mrs. Grace Moody-Stuart  
Councillor Colin Aherne  
Councillor Nicholas Botterill

### ITEM

### ACTION

#### INTRODUCTORY WELCOME & VOTE OF THANKS

The Chair welcomed to their first meeting Grace Moody-Stuart, newly appointed independent member of the Committee, and Lesley Courcouf, newly appointed Assistant Chief Executive (Organisational Development) and Monitoring Officer.

The Chair also paid fulsome tribute to Henry Peterson, former Monitoring Officer and Director of Policy & Administration who had recently retired from the Council's service, and to Chris Troke, the Chair of the Committee for the past year.

Item 1 **MINUTES - 15 MARCH 2005**

PAD(JPC) to note.

In response to a query by members under matters arising, the Committee were advised that the previous concerns of the Audit Commission relating to the Council's ethical framework had now largely been addressed by the establishment of a new Audit Committee, which would be commencing its work and operations in January 2006.

**RESOLVED** - That the minutes be confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

Item 2 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

PAD(JPC) to note.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Chris Allen

Item 3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

PAD(JPC) to note.

No declarations of interest were made by members at this meeting of the Committee.

Item 4 **STANDARDS COMMITTEE CONSTITUTION & TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Noted the Committee's revised constitution and terms of reference, as agreed by the Annual Council in May 2005.

Item 5 **4th ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES**

Noted the reports by the Chair and Grace Moody-Stuart on the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Assembly of Standards Committees held on 5 & 6 September in Birmingham, which both had attended as the Committee's representatives.

Noted the themes of this year's Conference had been the role played by local Committees in raising and keeping consistently high standards of conduct amongst Councillors; the key role to be played by independent members on local Standards Committees in ensuring this; and the more robust line that would be taken by the Standards Board in referring cases down to local Standards Committees for investigation & determination in the future.

Noted also that the the Standards Board had now published its response to the consultation on the review of the Code of Conduct, as set out at pp. 22-26 of the Committee agenda.

**RESOLVED** – That the reports, oral feedback and Conference material circulated at the meeting be noted.

Item 6 **ETHICAL HEALTH-CHECK INDICATORS / WORK PROGRAMME**

Noted that this item had arisen as a result of an "ethical health-check" of the authority recently undertaken by the Audit Commission. The ethical health-check had been created by the Audit Commission in conjunction with the Standards Board following research which suggested a correlation between a strong ethical framework and good governance. The promotion and maintenance of high ethical standards by Councillors and authorities had therefore been made a key line of enquiry in local Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessments for 2005 and future years, and was an issue that had been

highlighted at the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of Standards Committees.

The Chair advised members the Annual Conference had emphasised that a key element of work for the Committee in the forthcoming year would be to pro-actively raise its profile and that of the independent members, both amongst Councillors and the public at large.

To this end, independent members had agreed among themselves to attend certain Scrutiny Panels and Committee meetings during November in order to observe and gain an understanding of the dynamics and working of the parties and the authority, which being independent of the council, they often missed.

JPC/ACE(P&P)  
to arrange with  
Scrutiny / PAC  
co-ordinators.

It was the intention that this would then be followed by further training both for Councillors and staff as required, starting with the Committee itself. The Chair advised members that the Standards Board had offered to provide guest speakers for local training sessions who could explain more fully the working and role of the Standards Board and that of local members when undertaking local investigations.

Michael Cogher, Head of Legal Services, advised members that although there were external commercial training courses available dealing with local investigations, in fact much would depend on the details of any particular case itself, and professional legal advice would be made available to the Committee at the time. He undertook however to provide initial in-house refresher training for independent members on the Code of Conduct, covering issues such as bringing one's office into disrepute, bullying, personal & prejudicial interests and the definition of friendship.

MC/HLS to action  
& provide in Dec.

Lesley Courcouf, Monitoring Officer, also advised members that as 2006 was a year of Borough Elections, the initial training provided by the Head of Legal Services could be followed up after the May 2006 elections with a more detailed induction session with the new Councillors on the Code of Conduct to which a representative from the Standards Board could be invited at that time.

MC/HLS to  
arrange with  
SBfE for 2006  
induction  
session.

In terms of raising the profile of the Committee and the independent members generally, the Monitoring Officer suggested that an interview with the Chair / article in the Borough magazine (HFM) on the work of the Committee might be an appropriate vehicle, as this was widely circulated within the Borough and was also posted on the Council's website.

JPC/ACE(P&P)  
to arrange with  
Press Office

Councillor members also asked that a more detailed work

programme for the Committee be drawn up, to be brought back to the next meeting in January 2006, which was agreed.

**RESOLVED:**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. That a more detailed work programme be drawn up for the next meeting of the Committee, and placed as a standing item on future Standards Committee agenda.  | LC/ACE(OD);<br>MC/HLS;JPC/<br>ACE (P&P) to<br>note & action |
| 2. That an initial training session on the Code of Conduct be arranged in December for the independent members.  | MC/HLS to action  |
| 3. That a more detailed induction session for new Councillors & independent members on the Code of Conduct / ethical framework be arranged for after May 2006, and the SBfE be invited to send a representative to address Councillors on their work & role. | MC/HLS to<br>arrange for May<br>2006 induction<br>session.  |

Meeting began 7:00 pm  
Meeting ended 7:51 pm

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CHAIR

jpc/26/10/05