

Minutes of: STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 13 March 2003

Present: Councillor J Smith (in the Chair);
Councillors C M Fitzgerald, D M Higgin and
S Mason.
Mr A Withington.

Apologies for Absence: Mrs A Brown and Mr J Lodge.

Public Attendance: There were no members of the public in attendance.

S.1238 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair, Councillor J Smith, declared an interest in Agenda Item 10, Independent Remuneration Panel, in so far as it related to allowances for the Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

S.1239 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No members of the public attended the meeting to raise questions about issues within the remit of this Committee.

S.1240 MINUTES

Delegated decision:

That the Minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 16 January 2002, be approved as a correct record.

S.1241 AUDIT SUB-COMMITTEE

A note on the deliberations of the Audit Sub-Committee which had been held on 12 March 2003, was submitted.

It was reported that the main item of business had been the District Audit Annual Audit Letter for 2001/2002 and that the Sub-Committee had also considered reports on the District Audit Follow-up Review of the New Democratic Arrangements 2001/2002 – Authority Action Plan and the Employee Car Loan Scheme, both of which appeared on this agenda.

Delegated decision:

That the note on the deliberations of the Audit Sub-Committee held on 12 March 2003, be noted.

S.1242 PARTNERSHIP GOVERNANCE

A report of the Assistant Chief Executive, which had been considered by the Audit Sub-Committee on 11 December 2002, was submitted which pointed out that a review of Partnership Governance Arrangements had been included within District Audit's Plan for 2002/2003.

The Council was also carrying out a Best Value Review of Corporate Governance arrangements during 2002/2003 in the context of the Council's Corporate Governance Framework. The reports, together with an Action Plan, had been approved by the Sub-Committee.

With regard to the Action Plan, Members remarked on recommendation R4 which stated "clearly define the roles and responsibilities of Officers and Members and ensure they are understood by all concerned in Partnership Working". Members felt that this particular recommendation should be given a high priority rather than a medium one.

The Assistant Chief Executive reported that a report on this issue was being forwarded to the Executive on 19 March 2003. Amongst the options being considered would be the provision of Partnerships/Grant Aid Agreements when grants in excess of £5,000 are made available to organisations.

Delegated decision:

That the report be noted.

S.1243 n INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

The Chief Executive presented a report which set out the deliberations of the Independent Remuneration Panel which met on Wednesday, 5 March 2003.

The Panel had been convened in order to consider outstanding issues following approval of the scheme for Members' Allowances for 2003/2004. This included a request by this Committee that the indexation of Special Responsibility Allowances be not applied and the Panel be requested to consider the most appropriate way of indexing the level of Special Responsibility Allowances for future years.

The Chief Executive pointed out that with regard to the financial implications of the application of the proposals set out, this would be updated for the report presented to Council on 9 April 2003. The Panel had considered carefully the indexation of Special Responsibility Allowances and had taken advice on the mechanisms applied in other Authorities. The Panel considered that there was a clear relationship between the Basic Allowance and the Special Responsibility Allowance and it was important that these were seen as a package. The Panel held the view that a demonstrable means of applying to each a fair and equitable method of review was essential.

In addition to this issue, the Panel had been asked to consider the following which had arisen since the Scheme had been implemented:-

- **The role of the Chair of the Human Resources and Appeals Panel.**
- **A request from the association of Greater Manchester Authorities that allowances be paid to Council representatives on the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority.**

- **The level of allowance payable to the Mayor.**

n RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL:

That the findings of the Independent Remuneration Panel with regard to the following issues be recommended to Council:-

- 1. That a Special Responsibility Allowance of £5,250.00 be paid to the Chair of the Human Resources and Appeals Committee.
(Note: In accordance with standing order 17.5, Councillor Higgin asked that his abstention from voting be recorded).**
- 2. That a payment of £1728.00 be paid to the Council's representatives on the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority in accordance with the recommendation of the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities.
(Note: In accordance with standing order 17.5, Councillor Higgin asked that his abstention from voting be recorded).**
- 3. The position be reaffirmed whereby the level of allowances payable in respect of the Special Responsibility Allowance should be increased annually at the same rate as the pay award agreed by the Joint Council for Local Government Services. In light of this, it is recommended that the April 2003 pay award of 3.5% be applied to the allowances as set out in the report whilst recognising that the 3% award backdated to July 2002 and the 1% from October 2002 have not been applied to the initial recommendation.
(Note: In accordance with standing order 17.5 Councillor Higgin asked that his abstention from voting be recorded and Mr Withington asked that his vote against this decision be recorded).**
- 4. That the Mayor's allowance be increased from £12,000 to £12,800, which is the average of allowances paid within Greater Manchester and thereafter increased in line with Local Authority pay awards with effect from the new municipal year.
(Having declared an interest in this item, Councillor Smith asked that his abstention from voting be recorded).**

S.1244 EMPLOYEE CAR LOAN SCHEME – MEMBERS UPDATE

A report of the Director of Finance and E-Government was submitted which updated Members on the report submitted to Audit Sub-Committee on 12 March 2003, regarding the performance of the Authority's Car Loan Scheme, and which provided information on the issues to be considered in the next major review. It was now some 7 years since the last major review of this scheme and there were several indicators suggesting that a further review was now needed. These were:-

- To address the decline in participation in the scheme.
- To address the upturn in accounts being written-off in the scheme.

- To address Elected Members' concern over the absence of any kind of 'credit checking' prior to advancement of a loan under the scheme.
- To incorporate the terms of lending under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 into the scheme.
- To incorporate lending against the purchase of motorcycles into the Scheme.

It was reported that following consideration of the report at its meeting on 12 March 2003, the Audit Sub-Committee had resolved that a major review of the Employee Car Loan Scheme be undertaken taking into consideration issues raised in the report.

Delegated decisions:

1. That the decision of the Audit Sub-Committee be noted.
2. That in undertaking a review of the scheme, the following factors be taken into account:-
 - The scheme be restricted to Essential Car Users only.
 - Maximum limits be set with regard to the purchase of a car and the purchase of a motorcycle.
 - There should be a maximum time period for repayment of a loan and the use of direct debit should be investigated.
 - The level of interest rate should be set at a fixed amount and participants should be allowed to pay in excess of the required monthly amount so as to reduce the loan interest and complete the contract inside the specified period.

S.1245 DISTRICT AUDIT “FOLLOW-UP REVIEW OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC ARRANGEMENT 2001/2002” - AUTHORITY ACTION PLAN

The Acting Director of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report which summarised the “Follow-up Review of the New Democratic Arrangements” carried out by District Audit and set out the response made by the Council. An Action Plan had been produced around the recommendations contained in the report in terms of Area Structure; People and Relationships; Decision Making and Scrutiny. It was pointed out that much progress had been made since the report had been compiled.

Delegated decision:

That the report be noted and the Action Plan in response to the report be endorsed.

S.1246 n PROBITY IN PLANNING – CODE OF CONDUCT

A report of the Monitoring Officer was submitted which presented to Members a revised Code of Conduct for dealing with planning issues.

The updated Code had been produced in order to incorporate within the existing Code, which had been agreed on 31 March 2001, an agreed Protocol for Area Board involvement in planning issues and the aspects of the Council's Code of Conduct which had been approved by the Council on 10 April 2002.

n RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL:

That Council be recommended to approve the Code of Conduct for Probity in Planning subject to the description of sites in Paragraph 12.3 of the Code, incorporating measurements which are more easily understood by lay persons.

S.1247 URGENT BUSINESS

(The Chair agreed to permit consideration of the following matter under Urgent Business as it would be the last meeting within the current municipal year to which points regarding conduct of Members could be referred).

Conduct of Members

Concern was expressed regarding recent letters which had been sent by Members of Council to the press and it was emphasised that Members should take care when corresponding with the press on issues which concern them.

S.1248 VOTE OF THANKS

The Chair thanked Members for their contributions during the current municipal year and he in turn was thanked by Members for the way in which he had chaired meetings of this Committee.

J SMITH
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 6.30 pm and ended at 8.20 pm)