

<b>Minutes of:</b>	<b>STANDARDS COMMITTEE</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	29 September 2005
<b>Present:</b>	Councillor K Audin (in the Chair); Councillors E B Briggs, R C A Brown, V D D'Albert, T Holt and J F Walton
<b>Independent Members:</b>	A Brown, K Wainwright and A Withington
<b>Public Attendance:</b>	There were no members of the public in attendance at the meeting.
<b>Apologies for Absence:</b>	Councillor J Grimshaw and Mr A Loyns

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#### **S.01 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

#### **S.02 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present to ask questions under this item.

#### **S.03 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

It was reported that further to Minute S.83 Allowances for Independent Members that the Independent Remuneration Panel would meet on 20 October 2005, to consider the suggestion of this Committee with regard to allowances for Independent Members who sit on Hearing Panels.

##### **It was agreed:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2005, be approved and signed as a correct record.

#### **S.04 ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES**

A report of the Monitoring Officer was submitted which provided information on the major topics discussed at this year's Annual Assembly of Standards Committees which took place at the Birmingham International Conference Centre on 5 and 6 September 2005.

It was reported that two Committees had recently reported on the ethical framework in Local Government and had made recommendations to the Government. A Committee set up by the Deputy Prime Minister had recommended that decisions as to whether or not to investigate a complaint should be filtered through the Standards Board as at present. The Committee on Standards in Public Life was of the opinion that such decisions should be taken at a local level.

It was also reported that the Standards Board had made recommendations to the Government with regard to the Code of Conduct and had suggested that the

current Code needed to be simplified and that the sections on Interests needed to be revived in order to improve the balance between protection of decision making and the role of Councillors as democratically elected advocates on behalf of their communities. The full response of the Standards Board had been included with the report.

**It was agreed:**

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the issues raised in this report form the basis of the next Standards Bulletin.

**S.05 HOW TO CONDUCT AN INVESTIGATION**

A document produced by the Standards Board was submitted which provided an introduction to the practice of investigation and was designed to help Monitoring Officers and anyone else delegated to investigate allegations of misconduct referred to them by the Standards Board for England.

**It was agreed:**

That the document produced by the Standards Board be noted.

**S.06 REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Further to Minute S.81(3) of the meeting held on 2 June 2005, it was reported that three Members had changed their entry in the Declarations of Interest Register.

**It was agreed:**

That the report be noted and investigation take place into how the Register of Interest can be accessed electronically both in terms of the Member Form and the actual Register.

**S.07 WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2005/2006**

A report of the Monitoring Officer was submitted which provided an update on the following items contained within the Committee's Work Programme for 2005/2006:-

- Member Training
- Local Government Ombudsman – Annual Report
- Corporate Complaints Procedure
- Review of Code of Conduct
- Standards Bulletins

**It was agreed:**

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Review of Whistle Blowing Policy be removed from the Committee's Work Programme in view of the fact that the matter had been considered as part of the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy in September 2004.

**S.08 ANNUAL REPORT OF MONITORING OFFICER**

The Monitoring Officer submitted her Annual Report which provided an overview of the work of the Monitoring Officer in the past 18 months and identified and promoted examples of best practice and provided an opportunity to review and learn from experience.

The report set out the Monitoring Officer's statutory responsibilities; summarised how these duties had been discharged during 2004/2005 in accordance with the Council's Constitution, legislative requirements and relevant Government guidance and drew attention to those issues which would require attention in the year ahead.

Of particular relevance for this Committee were the sections on Codes of Practice; Reports from the Local Government Ombudsman; the ethical framework and support to the Standards Committee; and the work of the Independent Remuneration Panel.

**It was agreed:**

1. That the report be noted.
2. That investigation take place into the possibility of introducing a Guidance Document for non voting Co-opted Members of Committees.

**S.09 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**It was agreed:**

That in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business since it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information.

**S.10 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMEN – ANNUAL LETTER 2004/2005  
(E)**

A report of the Monitoring Officer was submitted which presented to Members the Ombudsman's Annual Letter for 2004/2005.

Particular reference had been made to the fact that the average achieved by the Council for responding to complaints was 33 days against a target date of 21. Performance on this would continue to be monitored.

The report also made reference to a particular case involving Social Services where the failure of a contractor to meet a required standard had resulted in poor service.

**It was agreed:**

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the appropriate Director be asked to attend this Committee to consider the issues surrounding the case referred to.
3. That in cases where maladministration is found by the Ombudsman, a report be brought to this Committee at the earliest opportunity.

**COUNCILLOR K AUDIN**  
**Chair**

**(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.10 pm)**