

Minutes of:	STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	24 October 2007
Present:	Councillors K Audin, R C A Brown, M Connolly, V D D'Albert, D M Higgin and T Holt.
Independent Members:	A Brown, A Loyns, K Wainwright (in the Chair) and A Withington
Public Attendance:	There were no members of the public in attendance at the meeting.
Apologies for Absence:	- Councillor J F Walton (CL)

S.372 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR 2007/2008

The Chair reported that Aidan Loyns had been appointed to serve as an independent Member of the Committee until May 2011. The Chair welcomed him back onto the Committee.

S.373 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

S.374 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

S.375 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 May 2007 were submitted.

Further to Minute S.33(2), it was reported that the Healthier Communities Scrutiny Commission had included within its work programme for this year the issue of Care Agencies providing services.

Delegated Decision:

That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

S.376 CORPORATE COMPLAINTS HANDLING REVIEW

It was reported that the Resource and Performance Scrutiny Commission had recommended the setting up of a Joint Working Group consisting of Members appointed from the Commission and the Standards Committee, together with the Executive Member for Community Relations, to input into the development of the Corporate Complaints process.

Delegated decision:

That Aidan Loyns be nominated as this Committee's representative on the Joint Working Group looking at the Corporate Complaints process.

S.377 SPEAKING RIGHTS AT PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE

It was reported that the Council had approved a recommendation from the Planning Control Committee that members of the public wishing to speak for or against an application at meetings of the Committee may now do so for 3 minutes and not 2 minutes as previously. The same length of time would be given to a Councillor speaking in respect of an application within the Ward he/she represented.

Councillor D'Albert expressed the hope that in the future, consideration may be given to a Member from within a township speaking on behalf of local Ward Councillors who were unavailable.

Delegated decision:

That the report be noted.

S.378 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN – ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINTS

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report which presented to Members information on Ombudsman complaints received during 2006 and 2007.

In accordance with a request made at the last meeting, information had been provided by the Ombudsman on complaints received against subject area, as well as against outcome. In addition, more details of the nature of complaints received and the length of time taken to deal with those complaints was included. The report provided explanatory information on cases which had taken 40 or more days to complete. Members acknowledged that whilst every effort should be made to adhere to the timescales laid down, there were occasions when additional time taken to resolve the complaint produced an outcome which was more acceptable to the complainant.

Delegated decision:

That the report be noted.

S.379 ETHICAL GOVERNANCE SURVEY

It was reported that the Monitoring Officer would be asking Members at the meeting of Council on 31 October 2007 to complete the survey questionnaire and that a summary of the responses would be reported to a future meeting of this Committee.

Delegated decision:

That the report be noted.

S.380 ANNUAL REPORT

The Monitoring Officer submitted her second 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, with an opportunity to review and learn from experience.

Delegated decision:

That the report be noted.

S.381 “THE CODE UNCOVERED”

Members were shown a DVD issued by the Standards Board for England, entitled “The Code Uncovered”, which had been produced as a training aid for local authorities and used a dramatised scenario to highlight key changes to the revised Code of Conduct.

The Members considered that the DVD was a very good training aid.

Delegated decision:

That the contents of the DVD be noted and the salient points contained within it be extracted and included in a summary document.

S.382 ANNUAL STANDARDS CONFERENCE

The Chair, together with Councillor Connolly, reported back on this year’s Annual Standards Conference which had taken place in Birmingham on 15 and 16 October 2007.

A major theme throughout the Conference had been the move towards local filtering next year which would enhance the role of both Monitoring Officers and local Standards Committees. The Committee considered that it was important that Members were geared up for this change and that the preparatory ground work should be undertaken as soon as possible. One particular issue focused upon was a potential conflict in the role of Members of the Standards Committee, who had a duty to determine whether or not a matter should go through to a Standards Hearing and who may subsequently then hear the matter. Members felt it seemed difficult to see how a conflict of interest could not arise and that consideration may have to be given as to how the roles could be split and whether the current level of Independent Members was sufficient.

Other issues identified as important during the Conference were the link between standards committees and scrutiny committees and how standards committees could become involved in the scrutiny process. Another issue was that of the profile of the Standards Committee and the need to engage with council leaders.

Delegated decision:

That the report be noted.

S.383 STANDARDS ISSUES

Members were invited to raise any issues arising from the work of the Committee. Ann Brown and Arthur Withington referred to their roles as representatives on the Audit Committee and the Resource and Performance Scrutiny Commission.

K WAINWRIGHT
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.35 pm)