

STANDARDS & ETHICS COMMITTEE

23 SEPTEMBER 2008

Present: Independent Members: Akmal Hanuk (Chairperson),
Maureen Hedley-Clarke, Deirdre Jones, Anne Morgan
and Paul Stockton

County Councillors Bowen, Davies and Rowland-
James

S7 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Standards & Ethics Committee held on 24 June 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

S8 : WHISTLEBLOWING UPDATE

The Committee was given an update on the Whistleblowing Policy. The Committee received a copy of an article in the Capital Times on the Whistleblowing Policy together with the "Our News" publication for staff which sets out the use of the policy and contact details.

The Committee were shown a DVD that answers frequently asked questions and outlines the way in which the policy works. The Committee was advised that the DVD had been advertised on the Intranet and had received a good response. The DVD was set up as a pilot for the delivery of information and is now the preferred option of the Communications Team for delivery of information.

The Monitoring Officer outlined the types of reports made under the Policy.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

S9 : MEMBER DEVELOPMENT TRAINING 2008

As part of Cardiff Council's approved Member Development Strategy, a Member Development Programme was devised in order to introduce new Members to the way that Cardiff Council, and Local Government in general functions, and to provide relevant development opportunities for

Councillors so that they could gain a better understanding of their role and perform their duties in the most effective way.

Training opportunities were made available to Members in the following areas:-

- (i) Code of Conduct;
- (ii) Meeting Practice;
- (iii) How the Council Works;
- (iv) Role of Ward Members;
- (v) Planning (for Planning Committee Members);
- (vi) Introduction to the Role of Scrutiny;
- (vii) City Bus Tours;
- (viii) Equalities and Diversity;
- (ix) Decision Making for Licensing Committee Members;
- (x) ICT Skills Audit.

The Committee was advised that the training had been generally well supported by Members and feedback had been positive.

The next step was to provide tailored training for Member Development.

RESOLVED – That

- (1) the update be noted;
- (2) the importance of attending training on equalities and diversity be emphasised to Members by raising this with group whips.

S10 : ETHICAL STANDARDS AUDIT – REVIEW

The Committee at its meeting on 12 January 2006 resolved to conduct an Ethical Standards Audit of the Authority. The results of the audit were considered by the Committee at its meeting in October 2006.

The Committee resolved to repeat the audit in the autumn of 2007 with the 2006 results to be used as a baseline.

The Committee was advised that due to the Council elections the Committee had not progressed the Ethical Audit Review and a decision was required on the action required to take the matter forward.

During consideration of the matter the Committee highlighted concerns about the poor response rates to the audit and suggested that the methodology be reviewed.

RESOLVED – That Committee members should send any further comments on the re-audit to Committee Services, who would then forward the same to the Cardiff Research Centre, and ask for these to be reflected in a proposal for the re-audit, which would then be submitted for consideration by the Committee.

S11 : MONITORING OFFICER'S VERBAL UPDATE

(i) Planning Code of Practice and Review of Procedures

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that the Constitution Committee had given authority to bring forward a Planning Code of Good Practice which had been in abeyance pending publication of the new Code of Conduct. Authorisation had also been given to review planning procedures.

The Committee was advised that sessions to progress this with the Planning Committee were proposed to take place in October/November 2008.

A formal report would be provided at the next meeting of the Standards & Ethics Committee.

(ii) Standards Conference Wales - Feedback

Papers from the Conference which took place on 12 September 2008 were circulated to the Committee for information. The Conference was attended by Kate Berry, Councillor Ann Rowland-James and Maureen Hedley-Clarke (Independent Member).

The Monitoring Officer gave a brief overview of the topics covered by the speakers at the Conference. The Committee Members that attended the Conference felt that it had been a successful and worthwhile event.

The Committee was advised that Cardiff had been put forward to host the next Conference and a decision would be made in October 2008.

(iii) Relationships with Community Councils

The Monitoring Officer advised that training on the Code of Conduct had been offered to all Community Councils in Cardiff, the training had been well attended and the request to run a further session for those unable to attend has been received.

The Committee was advised that a model charter for relationships with Community Councils had now been issued as a formal document by the Welsh Assembly Government. It was suggested that this be taken forward by the Standards & Ethics Committee.

It was agreed that the Community Councils be invited to the November meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

S12 : COMMUNITY COUNCIL NOMINATION

The Committee received an update on the current position with regard to the appointment of a new Community Council Member to sit on the Standards & Ethics Committee following the expiry of the term of office of Community Councillor David Suthers on 1 May 2008.

In accordance with the Standards Committees (Wales) Regulations 2001 Community Councils were consulted on the appointment, following which the Council had received one nomination in respect of Community Councillor John Hughes, Chair of St Fagans Community Council.

Community Councils were invited to comment on this nomination, but no observations had been received.

Following consideration of the application, it was

RESOLVED – That the nomination received for the Community Council representation on the Committee be endorsed and Council be recommended to formally appoint Community Councillor John Hughes to the position.

S13 : MEETING WITH PARTY WHIPS

As part of the Committee's Work Programme, it was agreed to hold regular

meetings with the Party Whips to continue dialogue in order to improve practice within the Council and to invite them to put forward any areas of concern they might have. The Chairperson welcomed Councillors Piper, Robson, Cowan and McKerlich to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Councillor Islam who had a prior engagement.

The Chairperson advised that the Committee puts high importance on the regular meetings with the Party Whips and felt that the dialogue was very important to the Committee.

Councillor Robson made reference to the minutes of the Constitution Committee relating to changes in the way the Executive Members are appointed and suggested that the Committee should receive these minutes for information. In response to this point it was clarified that there had been no changes to the way in which the Executive are appointed, the amendment relates only to appointments to joint Committees. The clarification was noted.

In response to a query it was clarified that concerns relating to poor performance of the Council did not fall within the remit of the Standards & Ethics Committee and would be dealt with by Scrutiny Committees. The issue of raising concerns relating to the running of the Authority was discussed, and it was suggested that reference be made to paragraph (a) of the Committee's Terms of Reference when deciding whether it was a matter for the Standards & Ethics Committee.

Councillor Piper thanked the Committee for its invitation and advised that on this occasion he had no specific concerns relating to the ethics of the Council; he added that the meetings were useful for dialogue between the parties and the Committee.

Training for new members was discussed and concern was expressed by the Committee that training on equality and diversity had received the lowest attendance of the training offered. The Committee stressed the importance of equalities training for all Members of the Council as the implications of getting it wrong could have a negative impact on the representation of the Council.

The Party Whips present were asked to remind all Members of their political party of the importance of attending equalities training.

The Committee discussed the ethical audit with the Members present and highlighted their concerns about the poor response rates from Members at the last ethical audit resulting in the audit being repeated. A low response rate limits the value of the audit. The Whips were asked to encourage their Party Members to return the questionnaires when the next audit was undertaken.

In response Councillor Piper confirmed that Members could be encouraged to respond to audits via the Groups.

During the discussion it was suggested that in order to gain a good response rate the questionnaire must contain the right pitch, and the key to increasing turnout is to emphasise the benefits of the audit to the Council and elected Members.

Assessing training needs of Members was discussed and it was suggested that it might be appropriate for assessments on training needs for Members to be carried out in Party Groups.

The Chairperson thanked the whips for attending and taking part in the discussions. In conclusion the Chairperson reiterated that the whole point of training was to raise standards within the Council and well attended training was key to achieving this goal.

S14 : WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee discussed its Work Programme and made a number of observations on the topics listed for consideration and suggested an appropriate timetable.

It was agreed that it would be appropriate to invite Community Councils to attend the meeting of the Committee in November 2008.

RESOLVED – That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2008/09 be updated in accordance with the Committee's suggestions;
- (2) the Community Councils be invited to attend the November 2008 meeting of the Committee.