

STANDARDS & ETHICS COMMITTEE

26 JANUARY 2010

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

County Councillors Bowen, Davies and Wakefield

Community Councillor John Hughes

Anne Morgan (Vice-Chairperson), took the Chair for the first item of business.

S24 : ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON

The Committee was advised that Akmal Hanuk had been reappointed by Council to the Standards and Ethics Committee for a second four year term. It was noted that the Committee was required to formally elect a Chairperson.

RESOLVED – That Akmal Hanuk be elected as Chairperson for the Standards and Ethics Committee.

Akmal Hanuk took the Chair and thanked the Committee for electing him as Chairperson.

S25 : MINUTES

That subject to the following amendments, the minutes of the meeting of the Standards and Ethics Committee held on 17 November 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chairperson:-

- (i) Remove Akmal Hanuk's name from the list of those present;
- (ii) Insert Deirdre Jones name in the list of those present.

S26 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part III of the Members' Code of Conduct to declare any interests in general terms and complete personal interest forms at the start of the meeting and then, prior to the commencement of the discussion of the item in question, specify whether it is a personal or prejudicial interest. If the interest is prejudicial, Members would be asked to leave the meeting, and if the interest is personal, Members would be invited to stay, speak and vote.

S27 : WEB PRESENTATION

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that a considerable amount of work had been carried out to improve the Council's website and a presentation would be given to update Members on the information available on the Website and how to access the information.

The Chairperson welcomed Cath Thomson, Operational Manager, Corporate Communications and Anthony Price, Multi Media Officer, Corporate Communications to the meeting.

Cath Thomson gave a brief outline of the background, the current content and associated information available on the Council's website and aspirations for the future of the website.

The Committee was advised that everything on the website is updated regularly and is available bi-lingually.

The Committee was advised that the website had previously been difficult to understand and in order to improve accessibility, the Council set up a Content Management system to move a large amount of information into a more structured framework, the content management system has now been in place for five years. It is intended that the Corporate Communications Team will work with the Council's new Technology Partner to ensure new management systems are communication based.

The most recent project was to redesign the front page of the site to make it more user friendly.

It was noted that the technology has developed and the customer base is

developing with a greater demand for information on line.

The Council is a huge organisation with over 700 services to put into a structure that people outside of the organisation can understand and access easily. In order to achieve its goal, there is a huge amount of research needed to ascertain how people access the site and to restructure the site to meet the needs of the customers and to prioritise information on the site for ease of access.

A considerable amount of work had gone into developing the website including research, and the involvement of Stakeholder Groups. This will be an on-going process to ensure people's needs for accessing information and services are met.

Reference was made to the home page information, the Committee was advised that current issues such as information bulletins would be included on the home page including current issues such as snow page reports, flood page and changes in collections.

Feedback from customers has been very positive and visits to the site have increased to over 2.25 million from 197 different countries. The site is now customer focussed and information has been prioritised to meet the customers' needs, the Council are continuing to monitor usage of the site.

The website is also used as a marketing tool, this works well and is far more cost effective than on-street campaigning.

The Committee was advised that trust is essential and the Council is a gateway to other websites, this adds value to the Council's website and also allows the Council to build relationships with other Partners.

In conclusion the Committee was advised that the home page had been finalised together with some second layers of information which has been grouped together and listed and the Communications Team are working with service areas to encourage them to group information together to provide an effective means of making information readily available.

Following the presentation the Committee asked questions and made the following observations:-

- The Committee noted that the Council had recently appointed a

technology partner which would provide greater flexibility in provision of information electronically through the use of a digitised database. There would be a slimming down of the back office function which would enable savings to be made.

- The issue of accessibility for people with disabilities was raised, in response, assurance was given that the site had been developed in consultation with the Accessibility Group to ensure maximum accessibility for all.
- Concern was expressed that not everyone has access to a computer and not everyone is IT literate therefore it is important to ensure that everything the Council does is reasonable and equitable and available to all Cardiff citizens and to a wider audience.

In response to the point about accessibility, the Committee was advised that the website is only one channel of access to the Authority, a series of workshops had been held to test potential channels for information throughout the city, the Council aim to carry out a consultation in respect of user channel accessibility. It is important that the Council is accessible in a number of ways and work is ongoing to improve access to services and to take account of people's views to provide a strategy for the whole of Cardiff.

- The Committee queried whether the information on the website was updated on a regular basis and whether there are facilities to allow all staff to update the information. It was confirmed that the information is updated weekly and that each service area has designated persons that can access and update the relevant information.
- Reference was made to accessibility to consultation and concern was expressed that the 'Have Your Say' option was not easy to locate. The Committee was advised that consultation was also accessible through 'Ask Cardiff'.
- The Committee suggested that public transport information should be given a higher profile on the website to encourage greater usage. The Committee was assured that work is ongoing to improve this type of information.
- In response to concerns raised about security, the Committee was assured that ICT have robust security measures in place.

In response to a query about financial resources, the Committee was advised that there is no specific budget for the website at the moment and is currently being operated in-house using existing skills and by working with service areas, it was noted that resources would be needed in the next financial year due to the significant changes to the website.

The Chairperson thanked the Officers for presenting the website and for their responses to questions put forward by the Committee.

RESOLVED - That the information be noted and a further update be given in six months time.

S28 : NEWSPAPER EDITORS' CODE OF PRACTICE - PRESS COMPLAINTS COMMISSION – EDITORS' COMMITTEE REVIEWS THE CODE

The Commission on the Governance of Cardiff Council highlighted the importance of the role of the media in supporting Standards in Public Life, this issue was considered by the Committee in July and September 2007.

At its meeting in September 2007 the Committee received a report on media protocols including the Editors' Code of Practice which is overseen by the Press Complaints Commission, the Committee noted the information at that time and were of the view that it was not necessary to put in place a specific media protocol for Members of the Council as they had signed up to the Cardiff Undertaking and were governed by the Members' Code of Conduct.

The Committee discussed the Editors' Code of Practice and noted the information presented. The Committee noted that the Editors' Code of Practice Committee writes and revises the Code, which is overseen by the Press Complaints Commission. The consensus of the Committee was that they did not wish to comment on the Editors' Code of Practice as part of its annual review.

RESOLVED – That the review of the Editors' Code of Practice be noted, and the Committee agreed that it did not wish to put forward comments as part of the review.

S29 : MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT – DRAFT GUIDANCE FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

The Committee was advised that the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales had issued draft guidance on the Members' Code of Conduct which applies to all Members and Co-opted Members of local Authorities, Community Councils, Fire and Rescue Authorities and National Park Authorities in Wales. All Members are required to sign up to the Code as part of their declarations and acceptance of office. The Committee noted that the draft Guidance draws heavily on the Guidance issued by Standards for England on the English Code of Conduct but has been extended and amended to refer to the Welsh Code and Welsh context.

The Monitoring Officer invited observations from the Committee which would form part of the response to the consultation.

The Monitoring Officer briefly outlined the general issues raised in a recent meeting of the Welsh Monitoring Officers Group. The Committee noted the importance of the document and was concerned that the deadline did not allow sufficient time to consider and respond appropriately and requested the Monitoring Officer to write to the Ombudsman for Wales requesting an extension to the consultation deadline.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed to meet as a Task and Finish Group to fully discuss and make comments to draft a response to the consultation.

RESOLVED –That

- (1) A Task and Finish Group comprising any available Members of the Committee be set up to discuss the draft guidance and formulate a response to the consultation;
- (2) The Monitoring Officer writes to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales expressing the Committee's concerns that there had been insufficient time allowed to properly consider and respond to the document within the deadline and to request that the deadline be extended to allow a full response from participating Authorities.

S30 : MEMBER APPRAISALS

The Monitoring Officer outlined the report on Member Appraisals together with recommendations on the suggested way forward. Members of the Committee had indicated as part of their development programme that there should be an appraisal of their own skills and contribution to the work of the Committee linked with an individual assessment of their development needs, which could then be considered as a pilot for any future extension of appraisals throughout the Council.

It was suggested that the appraisals take the form of a 1 to 1 discussion between individual Members and the Chairperson, each discussion would be confidential between the Member and the Chairperson and not open to others.

The Monitoring Officer outlined the suggested structure for the appraisals and invited the Committee to consider their development needs in the context of the smooth running of the Committee with a view to improving the process and enhancing the skills the Committee already has.

In conclusion, the Monitoring Officer advised that the Council intends to seek accreditation from the WLGA Member Development Charter and work is ongoing to develop the current programme so that its aspiration can be met.

The Committee made the following observations:

- In response to a query about appraising the Chairperson, it was suggested that the Chairperson be appraised by the Vice-Chairperson;
- Reference was made to appraisals for Council Members, for information it was highlighted that elected Members are appraised every 4 years when elected and also appraised by their respective Groups, if necessary, action would be taken by the Group to identify and address any issues.
- It was noted that elected Members already have tight schedules and any further demands on their time would put additional pressure on them.

RESOLVED – That

- (1) The Council's aspiration to seek accreditation to the WLGA Charter for Member Support and Development be endorsed;
- (2) An appraisal Scheme be adopted on the following basis:-
 - Appraisals should take the form of 1 to 1 discussions between the Chair of the Committee and the individual member on an annual basis, appraisal of the Chairperson would be undertaken by the Vice-Chairperson;
 - Each appraisal will be confidential to the Chairperson and individual member;
 - The structure of the discussion will be in the format shown in Appendix 3 to the report;
 - Any development needs to be identified for individual members will be met by the Council within the budgets set for training and development;
 - Following the appraisal, the Chairperson will advise the Council of the proposed training and development needs for each member of the Committee and a training plan would then be agreed with that member.

S31 : WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED – That consideration of the Work Programme be deferred to the next meeting of the Standards and Ethics Committee on 23 March 2010.

S32 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 23 MARCH 2010