

## **STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

At a meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2002 at 6.00 pm.

### **PRESENT**

Councillors: Mrs J.E. Lloyd, M. Notley and K. Vale.

Independent Members: Mr D. Morgan (Chair), Mr B. Keene.

The formal Minutes of this meeting comprise this covering document detailing the decisions taken, together with the agenda papers and reports referred to herein. Each Minute relates to the item bearing the same numbers on the agenda.

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no apologies for absence. Mr D. Morgan indicated that in view of his recent appointment as non-executive director of North Hertfordshire Primary Care Trust he would declare his interest at Committee as appropriate and this interest had been noted in the Register of Members' Interests.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, welcomed Mr B. Keene to this his first meeting.

### **2. MINUTES**

It was RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2002 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

### **3. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Committee considered a report proposing the extension of its terms of reference to cover several additional matters. Members considered that these would contribute to ensuring that standards and ethics were at the heart of the authority. During discussion there was general agreement that the Committee's proposed review of the register of Members' interests should be annual and that this would encourage an appropriately frequent reconsideration by each Member of their declarable interests.

It was RESOLVED that Council be invited to extend the terms of reference of the Standards Committee to cover the matters set out below:-

- (i) dealing with any matters referred from the Council or any other body;
- (ii) to consider reports and other communications from external and internal audit relating to good governance and the ethical standards of the Authority, without any limitation on the statutory powers of the Standards Committee to make recommendations to the Executive or a Committee of the Council following such consideration;

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- (iii) to review aspects of the Constitution relating to other terms of reference for this Committee including matters covered by the ethical governance audit;
- (iv) to receive and consider general reports and communications from the Ombudsman and, at the discretion of the Committee, to report and make recommendations to the appropriate body;
- (v) to review and make recommendations on protocols and employment contract conditions dealing with ethical standards for officers' behaviour;
- (vi) to consider and make recommendations as appropriate on all protocols affecting the conduct of Members and officers;
- (vii) to review the register of Members' interests annually and in such a manner as the Committee feels appropriate.

*Reasons for decision:* As detailed in the report. With regard to (vii), the Committee considered that an annual review would assist Members to ensure they did not overlook any declarable interest they might have.

Other options considered: None.

### 4. ETHICAL GOVERNANCE AUDIT

The Committee considered a report detailing arrangements for an ethical governance audit for the Council and the engagement of an external consultant to undertake this. It was noted that this proposal followed a recommendation in the recent Annual Audit letter, that the Council carry out an ethical governance audit using model guidance set out by the I&DEA (attached at Appendix A to the report). The Committee considered the question of who should undertake the audit and noted that for several reasons this should be a person who was not an officer or Member of the Council. It was noted that the Institute of Public Finance, whose parent body was the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants, had taken a lead in this field and was responsible for much of the I&DEA draft. Members indicated their confidence in this body carrying out the audit. It was also noted that the costs, amounting to £9,000, could be met from within existing budgets.

It was RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the Institute of Public Finance be engaged to undertake an ethical governance audit as outlined in the report (Appendix 2 refers);
- (ii) that the results of the audit and any recommendations be reported to the next meeting of the Committee;
- (iii) that the Council's Portfolio holders be invited to attend the meeting to hear the results of the audit.

*Reasons for decision:* To comply with a recommendation in the annual Audit letter.

Other options considered: None.

## **5. ITEMS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION**

The Committee noted several issues for which reports were proposed at future meetings.

It was RESOLVED that reports on the following matters be brought to future meetings, as appropriate:-

- Officer Code of Conduct
- Officer/Member Protocol
- Guidance for Members on Code of Conduct

*Reasons for decision:* To fulfil the work of the Committee.

Other options considered: None.

## **6. DATES OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2002.

## **7. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was none.

## **8. DECISIONS AND SENDING UP**

It was noted that item 3, Terms of Reference of the Standards Committee, would be referred to Council.

**The meeting ended at 7.15 pm.**

**D. MORGAN**  
Independent Chair