

**NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Northallerton on Monday, 30 January 2006.

**PRESENT:-**

James F S Daghish in the Chair.

County Councillors: William F Barton OBE, Bernard Bateman MBE and Brian Marshall.

Independent Members: Gillian Fleming and Professor Alan Lawton.

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**COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK**

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**37. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED –**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2005 having been printed and circulated be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**38. PUBLIC QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS**

The Head of Committee Services reported that he had not received notice of any public question or statement to be made at the Committee.

**39. ETHICAL AUDIT**

**CONSIDERED –**

The report of the Monitoring Officer updating Members on the progress of the Ethical Audit. The preliminary results of the survey had been made available to Members prior to the meeting, together with a brief analysis by the Audit Commission. Further details of the results would be presented to the Committee, at a later date.

The Monitoring Officer referred to the Committee's previous decision that a survey should be conducted of the complete workforce. However, she suggested that it might be appropriate to conduct the survey through the staff reference groups which were being established. In addition it was proposed that the audit would include sessions with the Executive Members, wider membership and senior managers.

Members considered that there needed to be a wider involvement of staff in ethical matters but at a level commensurate with that person's work. There was also a need to highlight the work of the Standards Committee. The Chief Executive Officer considered it was important that the relevant ethical information was available and that staff were aware where that information could be obtained and therefore it was essential that awareness of ethical matters and the Standards Committee were raised. Methods of raising awareness included articles within the various staff newsletters; team briefings etc. There was a need for ethical standards to become part of the culture of the County Council and that this would only be achieved over a period of time.

Members discussed whether the results of the Ethical Audit should be publicised highlighting that the survey had been conducted; that there were no ethical issues requiring immediate attention; and that the County Council was one of the few authorities within England to have carried out such a survey.

Members gave consideration on the training of Members and officers. It was suggested that one of the appropriate forums at which training sessions could be given to Members was at Area Committees. The attendance of Members at Area Committee meetings was normally very good and other organisations also attended. It was suggested that two seminars should be held for Members of the Executive and senior officers and that Members of the Committee might wish to be involved.

**RESOLVED –**

- (a) That the next stage of the survey be focused work using the proposed staff reference groups, seminars with Executive Members and senior managers as detailed in paragraph 6.2 of the report.
- (b) That consideration be given to making presentations to the Area Committees on the results of the survey.

**40. STANDARDS OF CONDUCT IN ENGLISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT : THE FUTURE**

**CONSIDERED –**

The report of the Monitoring Officer concerning a paper prepared by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) on the Government's current views on the future of the conduct regime for local government in England. The Government's paper set out a vision for the future regime and provided a co-ordinated response to a series of recent recommendations, reviews and consultations relevant to conduct issues in local government.

A Member suggested that with regard to Group Research and Communications Officers, those employed by the authority were part-time posts but they were not able to take other employment from Political Parties such as election agents etc. As the person appointed to the post of Group Research and Communications Officer was normally committed to the Party for which they acted, the Member did not feel that this restriction was appropriate.

With regard to the suggestion by the Monitoring Officer that there might be scope for the formation of joint Standards Committees, it was important that elected Members from the authorities were involved with the work of their own authorities' Standards Committees.

As to the Officers Code of Conduct, it was suggested that any Code should include the necessity for senior officers to complete a Register of Interests.

**RESOLVED –**

That the Monitoring Officer submit comments on the paper to the ODPM.

**41. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

CONSIDERED –

The report of Monitoring Officer asking the Committee to consider what action should be taken to promote awareness of the work of the Committee and the Council's record in relation to ethical issues.

Members suggested various issues which might be appropriate for inclusion in a Communications Strategy including:-

- The results of the Ethical Audit
- The publication of a further edition of the Standards Bulletin, which could include the issues raised in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's paper "Standards of Conduct in English Local Government : The Future" and the establishment of an Independent Audit Committee.
- Profiles of Members of the Committee.

**RESOLVED –**

That the above issues be included in the draft Communications Strategy to be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

**42. ETHICS INDICATOR REPORT**

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Monitoring Officer in which she submitted statistics which had been agreed as ethical indicators which would give Members an indication of the health of the authority in relation to Standards and Ethics.

Members noted the contents of the report and suggested that the next report might include some external bench marks and further information as to the results of Employment Tribunals and clarification of other indices included within the report.

**RESOLVED –**

That the report be noted and a further report submitted in six months time.

**43. OFFICER CODE OF CONDUCT AND REGISTER PROGRESS**

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Monitoring Officer updating Members on the work being carried out to implement an Officer Register of Interests within the authority.

It was suggested that it might be appropriate for an article encouraging officers to complete the Register being included in a future edition of "County Talk".

**RESOLVED –**

That the report be noted.

**44. INDEMNITY FOR OFFICERS AND MEMBERS**

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Monitoring Officer in which she reported details of recent legislative changes to the powers of local authorities to grant indemnity for Members and employees. The report set out proposals for revisions to the current arrangements.

She reported that the County Council's insurers had increased the cost to the Council for those items which had not previously been covered by insurance.

**RESOLVED –**

That the report be noted.

**45. WORK PROGRAMME**

**CONSIDERED –**

The report of the Monitoring Officer seeking Members' views on the Work Programme and suggestions for the Forward Work Programme. The Monitoring Officer suggested that it might be appropriate for the Committee to consider whether Members' interests should be available on the County Council's internet site and it was suggested that the views of Members of the County Council should be sought.

**RESOLVED –**

That the report be noted and that the suggestions for the meeting to be held on 8 May 2006 be agreed.