

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**  
**10th February, 2011**

Present:- Mr. M. Andrew (in the Chair); Councillors Buckley and Gilding; Mrs. A. Bingham, Mr. I. Daines, Mr. P. Edler and Ms. J. Porter and Councillors D. Bates, D. Rowley and J. Sharman (Parish Councils' Representatives)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Austen and Middleton, Mr. D. Foster, Dr. G. Musson and Mr. N. Sykes

The Chairman welcomed Councillor D. Rowley to his first meeting of the Committee and introductions were made.

**B30        MINUTES**

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 13th January, 2011 be approved as a correct record.

**B31        STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP**

The Committee considered the notes of the meeting of the Working Group held on 7th January, 2011.

Mrs. A. Bingham (Chair of the Working Group) outlined the basis of the Working Group's discussions and rationale behind the agreed action points. The aim to try and establish a connection with parish councils through the Parish Network meetings was highlighted.

The Assistant Chief Executive, Legal and Democratic Services, confirmed that there was no formal position yet from the YLCA or NALC regarding the future of the standards regime. However, NALC had concerns which were reflected locally regarding:-

- self governance by town and parish councils
- the proposed criminalisation/sanctions in respect of the requirement to declare 'interests'

Resolved:- (1) That the information be noted and the action points accepted.

(2) That Mrs. A. Bingham attend the next meeting of the Parish Network scheduled for 3rd March, 2011.

(3) That the Assistant Chief Executive, Legal and Democratic Services, continue to liaise with the YLCA.

**B32        PARTNERSHIPS' GOVERNANCE COMPLIANCE**

Further to Minutes Nos. B9 and B10 of the meeting of this Committee held on 9th September, 2010, Rob Houghton, Governance and Risk Manager, presented the submitted updated Partnership Governance Compliance – Good Practice 2011 document having taken account of, and included issues from, the Standards for England protocol for local authority partnership working.

The additions to the original document were highlighted and explained.

Resolved:- That the information be noted.

### **B33 FIRST TIER TRIBUNAL DECISION**

The Committee considered the full decision of the First Tier Tribunal, held on 14th January, 2011, to consider the allegations against Councillor Ronald Law of Wales Parish Council.

Resolved:- (1) That the information be noted.

(2) That the Tribunal recommendation regarding the establishment and implementation of a grievance procedure be notified to all town and parish councils.

### **B34 CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING CODE**

Further to Minute No. B53 of the meeting of this Committee held on 11th February, 2010, the Assistant Chief Executive, Legal and Democratic Services, accompanied by the Assistant Chief Executive, Human Resources, presented the submitted report reviewing the operation of the Confidential Reporting Code. The current Code was submitted.

It was reported that only two concerns had been raised since the last report which were dealt with under the Code.

Awareness of the Code was a vital factor and the results of the Ethical Standards Survey were referred to the Standards Committee Working Group.

The Working Group felt there was a need to improve further the awareness levels of the arrangements and where to find the policy and procedures and also improve confidence in employees to feel comfortable about raising concerns under the policy. Suggested action points included:-

- publication of historical data/case studies on the website incorporating the process and outcomes
- provision of a simple electronic access/intranet link to the information
- provision of a very senior figure within the Council, as guardian or champion, to support anyone wishing to raise concerns under the policy

The Working Group also requested further feedback from the survey. From discussions held at focus groups to consider the latest Employee Opinion Survey, officers were reasonably confident that concerns about serious malpractice such as fraud would be reported. Reservations expressed were more likely to relate to lower levels of malpractice and poor management such as time sheet management. It was agreed that there was work to do with managers using alerts and reminders in relation to their roles and that appropriate links to e-learning should be made.

A Team Briefing was issued by Strategic Human Resources in November, 2010 on the Code of Conduct for employees. As part of this, managers were asked to discuss the content of the briefing with all employees and advise them to make themselves aware of the contents of the Code of Conduct and to the Confidential Reporting Code. References were made to the appropriate pages on the website where the Codes could be found.

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were covered:-

- KPMG contact details
- inclusion of wording in the Code that the Council had a responsibility to support anyone wishing to raise concerns under the Code
- details regarding the cases cited in the report
- this Committee's awareness of cases as they were reported/investigated
- status of any potential champion figurehead
- need for a re-launch of the Code

Resolved:- (1) That the information be noted.

(2) That the textual amendments, now discussed, be approved.

(3) That arrangements should be made for a re-launch of the Confidential Reporting Code.

(4) That a full account of the case now identified be submitted, in confidence, to the next meeting of this Committee.

## **B35 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the submitted work programme.

Resolved:- (1) That the latest position be noted.

(2) That a report on the future of the Standards Committee, including the views of town and parish councils, be built into the work programme.