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STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Monday, 21 June 2010

<u>Present:</u>	Brian Cummings (Chair)	
	Councillors	C Blakeley WJ Davies K Hayes AER Jones
		C Meaden L Rowlands P Williams
<u>Deputies</u>	Councillors	T Harney (In place of A Bridson) M Johnston (In place of R Wilkins)
<u>Independent Members</u>		Stella Elliot

1 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they were. No such declarations were made.

2 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2010 be approved.

3 MINUTES - MATTERS ARISING

- (a) Further to minute 24 (29 March 2010), the Chair commented that responses had been sought from the political groups in relation to a discussion paper that he had circulated on 25 January 2010 (minute 20 refers), following his attendance at the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees. Members expressed the view that this matter should be deferred to the next meeting, in order that it may be considered in the light of Code of Conduct training soon to be given to all Members of the Council.
- (b) Further to minute 28 (29 March 2010), the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management apologised to Members for not having presented to the Committee, information upon the results of enquiries with other local authorities in relation to the use of recording media at meetings and in Council meetings. He proposed to present a detailed report to the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved –

- (1) **That consideration of the views of Members and responses of the political groups to the discussion paper previously circulated by the Chair be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee.**

- (2) That the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management be requested to present a report to the next meeting of the Committee upon the results of enquiries with other local authorities in relation to the use of recording media at meetings and in Council meetings.**

4 COMPLAINTS AND CUSTOMERS FEEDBACK - ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10

The Director of Finance presented the Annual Report 2009/2010 on performance in dealing with customer feedback, which provided an analysis of contacts received over the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010. It highlighted trends and described some of the challenges faced in ensuring that all feedback was recorded and responded to consistently. Feedback was primarily recorded through the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and he commented that each department had a designated co-ordinator to record, assign, progress, chase and update contacts with resolution details. Customer Care Standards had been created to ensure that expected standards were met and their adoption had resulted in a marked improvement in the approach to customer feedback.

The Director commented that the challenge was to maintain consistency and drive service improvements. He commented that the Council did receive a significant number of compliments and expressions of satisfaction with services provided and these were shared with relevant staff groups. He set out the types of contact covered by the report and he provided a performance summary in relation to each. Developments for 2010/2011 included improved reporting procedures, customer satisfaction surveys and a review of Customer Care Standards. Improved consultation would be achieved through focus groups, questionnaires, exit surveys and feedback analysis and the Director intended that Freedom of Information (Fol) requests would be incorporated into the CRM module during 2010/2011.

Members expressed the view that the approach to corporate complaints should be reviewed by the Cabinet and commented specifically that, to take account of the increased use of e-mail, the corporate standard for the resolution of contacts from the public should be within 10 working days, to mirror the standard for Councillor/MP contacts. In response to further comments, the Director assured Members that the procedures would identify issues of malpractice and that departmental coordinators shared best practice and had received appropriate training.

Resolved –

- (1) That the report be noted.**
- (2) That the Cabinet be requested to review the Corporate Complaints and Feedback procedures to ensure improved future service delivery.**
- (3) That a detailed report be presented to the next meeting of the Committee in relation to the processes for dealing with Freedom of Information (Fol) requests.**

5 **FINDINGS OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN - COMPLAINT REGARDING MALADMINISTRATION OF A PLANNING APPLICATION**

The Director of Technical Services reported upon the outcome and recommendations from an investigation by the Local Government Ombudsman of a complaint arising from the maladministration, due to an error made, of a planning application and a consequent claim for compensation. The Director provided details of the error and, in response to comments from Members, set out the procedures that had been put in place to ensure that it would not be repeated. Regular checks were made, both by senior officers within the Department and by Internal Audit, to ensure that the procedures remained effective and were being followed by staff.

He set out the legal view and the final decision of the Local Government Ombudsman, who had concluded that the payment of compensation was appropriate. He had recommended that the Council pay a total amount of £5723 in compensation and the Director provided details of the award. However, as it exceeded the amount that could be authorised via his delegated powers, he sought approval from the Committee for payment to be made.

Resolved –

- (1) That the recommendation of the Local Government Ombudsman be accepted and the payment of compensation to the complainants, in the sum of £5723.00, be approved.**
- (2) That the result of benchmarking performance against other Merseyside authorities form the basis of a further report to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.**

6 **CODE OF CONDUCT**

The Chair advised the Committee that he had approved consideration of this matter as an item of urgent business. He had received a letter from a Member of the Committee, which questioned whether a debate at the last meeting of the Council with regard to the conduct of a particular Member, should have been referred to the Standards Committee for consideration.

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management indicated that he had given advice to the Council when asked to do so and his advice was that it was not unlawful for the matter to be debated at the Council meeting. With the agreement of the Committee, he proposed to give consideration to the letter received by the Chair and to present a report to the next meeting.

Resolved –

- (1) That the letter received by the Chair be circulated to all Members of the Committee for consideration.**
- (2) That the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management be requested to present a report to the next meeting of the Committee.**

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