

ITEM NO: 16

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| DECISION-MAKER: | COUNCIL |
| SUBJECT: | ANNUAL STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE BUSINESS REVIEW |
| DATE OF DECISION: | 12 MAY 2010 |
| REPORT OF: | CHAIR OF STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE |
| AUTHOR: | Name: BRIAN HOOPER (INDEPENDENT CHAIR) |

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

NOT APPLICABLE

SUMMARY

This report gives an overview of the work of the Standards and Governance Committee and outlines discussions held and decisions made at its meetings from May 2009 to April 2010.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (i) That the report be noted.

REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. This report is presented in accordance with the new Ethical Governance Review.

CONSULTATION

2. Appropriate consultation has taken place on each of the decision items summarised in this report.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

3. Not applicable.

DETAIL

4. This is the first Annual Report of the Standards and Governance Committee (S&GC), in response to a recommendation from the Ethical Governance Review. That review found that the Committee had a lower profile in the business of the Council than is the case in many other Local Authorities and this report is one means of raising that profile.
5. The fact that S&GC has a low profile to some degree reflects its role; it is a "back office" role, concerned not so much with the decisions the Council makes as with the processes by which it makes them. Its low profile might even be seen as to the Council's credit, reflecting as it does a high level of compliance with the Members' Code of Conduct, a high standard of financial probity and a relatively low level of complaints from the public. We nevertheless agree that we should not merely note those points in a rather dry and obscure Committee, but bring them to the attention of the Council and thereby the public.

6. Lest it might be thought that the Committee forms a positive view of the Council's performance because that is what the officers tell it, a brief description of its make-up may be helpful.
7. S&GC includes representation from all three political groups, mainly experienced councillors some of whom have also served the City as Mayor. It also includes four Independent Members, who have between them a wide range of experience in commercial project management, disability issues, the health service, local government and the voluntary sector. With that balanced and experienced membership, and with one of the independent members as its chair, the Committee is well placed to focus on how Councillors and the Council conduct themselves and their business, largely avoiding debate on particular Council decisions. Our external auditors are frequently in attendance, and comparisons are sought and obtained so that the Council's performance can be seen alongside that of similar Local Authorities.
8. While the Council's performance is good in all of the areas with which S&GC is directly concerned, there is always room for improvement and we make a point of seeking trend data to ensure that performance edges upward year on year.
9. The matters coming before S&GC in the year from May 2009 to April 2010 are as follows.

AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

10. We received this report at our meeting on 25 June; Cllr Ball, Chair of the Audit Committee, presented the report and responded to questions on it. We are grateful to the Audit Committee for the assurance they are able to give us on risk management, control and governance in the Council.

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

11. We received and approved the Statement of Accounts in June, seeking officers' explanations on some details and taking into consideration the recommendation to approve, made by the Audit Committee the previous day

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT/REPORT

12. The Annual Governance Statement was received and approved in June, as recommended by the Audit Committee the previous day. The Annual Governance Report, prepared by the Audit Commission, was received in September and its recommendations agreed. We were concerned that there was a delay in issuing an Audit Certificate but were satisfied that this did not indicate an issue of financial mismanagement.

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

13. Also in June we approved the Member Development Strategy for 2009-11, and the associated Action Plan, with some amendments regarding training on planning matters and training records.

ETHICAL GOVERNANCE HEALTH CHECK: ACTION PLAN

14. We approved this Action Plan in September; the report is one of the results of the Ethical Governance Health Check.

OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS

15. We were pleased to note from this report, presented in September, that Southampton has fewer matters referred to the Ombudsman than comparable other Local Authorities, and responds more quickly.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND LEARNING/HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS

16. We received this report in September, appearing to show a higher number of complaints than for our comparator Local Authorities although not all the comparative figures are available. We noted the lessons learned from these complaints, and will continue to consider the data annually.

CORPORATE COMPLAINTS

17. This report, also received in September, showed a substantial rise in complaints over the previous year, possibly due to better publicity about the complaints system, but was a favourable comparison with other Local Authorities. We will continue to consider the data annually.

AUDIT COMMISSION: ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER

18. In December 2009 we received the Audit Commission's letter on the 2008/09 financial year. The letter gave us assurance on the Council's financial management processes and identified a number of matters for further development, all of which are already being progressed by the Council.

CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

19. At our April meeting we considered a draft of the report presented to today's AGM on changes to the Constitution, and asked the Solicitor to the Council to give further consideration to the means by which Councillors are kept informed of significant decisions falling below the "Key Decisions" threshold of £500,000.

INFORMATION REQUESTS

20. Also in April we received a report on requests for information under the Freedom Of Information Act and other legislation, noting a continuing increase in the number and complexity of such requests.

CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

21. We approved this document in April, noting that it contained very similar information to that required by the Audit Commission in their Use of Resources Key Line of Enquiry. We gave our support to the officers in asking the Audit Commission to eliminate this duplication of reporting requirements.

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

22. The final item on our agenda over the year was a report on implementation of the Member Development Strategy, received in April. We noted internal audit recommendations on personal development planning for Members and on attendance records for Member training events, and asked to be kept informed regarding attendances.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Capital

17. Not applicable.

Revenue

18. Not applicable.

Property

19. Not applicable.

Other

20. None.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:

21. Section 111 Local Government Act 1972 and Local Government Act 2000

Other Legal Implications:

22. Not applicable.

POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

23. None.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices

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| 1. | None. |
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Documents In Members' Rooms

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| 1. | None. |
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Background Documents

Title of Background Paper | Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)

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| 1. | None. | |
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Background documents available for inspection at: Not applicable

KEY DECISION? No

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| WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED: | None |
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