

DECISION-MAKER:	COUNCIL
SUBJECT:	ANNUAL STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE BUSINESS REVIEW
DATE OF DECISION:	18 MAY 2011
REPORT OF:	CHAIR OF STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY	
Not applicable.	

BRIEF 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 2010 to April 2011.

RECOMMENDATION:

- (i) That the report be noted.

REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. This report is presented in accordance with the agreed recommendations arising from the 2009 Ethical Governance Review.

DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)

2. Appropriate consultation has taken place on each of the decision items summarised in this report.
3. This is the second Annual Report of the Standards and Governance Committee (S&GC), in response to a recommendation from the Ethical Governance Review. That review, conducted in 2009, 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 giving that profile a modest boost. We have taken the view that a modest increase in profile is all that is needed.
4. The Council continues to operate with 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. Given the negative press that we and all Councils often receive, it is important to recognise and applaud those high standards.
5. A brief reminder of the Committee's make-up may be helpful.
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 three Independent Members, who have between them a wide range of experience in commercial project management, disability issues, local government and the voluntary sector (for much of the year a fourth Independent Member brought experience from the health service, but regrettably she has now stepped down for personal reasons). 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

5. 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.

AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

6. We received this report at our meeting on 24 June. 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.

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT/REPORT

7. The Annual Governance Statement was received and approved in June, as recommended by the Audit Committee the previous day. We noted that the Comprehensive Area Assessment was no longer a requirement. The Annual Governance Report, prepared by the Audit Commission, was received in September. 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. There was debate on an item of disclosure in the accounts, and we agreed to support the view of the Interim Director of Resources.

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

8. We received and approved the Statement of Accounts in June, seeking officers' explanations on some details and requesting some amendments to the income analysis in the Explanatory Foreword.

OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS

9. We were pleased to note from this report, presented in September, that Southampton continues to have fewer matters referred to the Ombudsman than comparable other Local Authorities, and to respond more quickly. We also noted a small decrease in the number of referrals to the Ombudsman, compared to the previous year.

CORPORATE COMPLAINTS

10. This report, also received in September, showed a slight rise in complaints compared to the previous year, on top of a substantial increase from the year before that, but the previous favourable comparison with other Local Authorities still holds good. We will continue to consider the data annually.

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

11. We received this report in September. As in the previous year, this showed a higher number of complaints than for our comparator Local Authorities although not all the comparative figures are available. Complaints about children's services and learning showed a marked increase, although none came from children or young people. Freedom Of Information Act requests

also showed an increase. We noted the lessons learned from these complaints, and will continue to consider the data annually.

AUDIT COMMISSION: ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER

11. In December 2010 we received the Audit Commission's letter on the 2009/10 financial year. The letter gave us assurance on the Council's performance in financial management and value for money arrangements, and set out a number of challenges, primarily related to the economic downturn, which need to be monitored over the coming years.

CRB CHECKS FOR MEMBERS

12. In December 2010 we considered recommendations to change the level of CRB checks for Councillors, and agreed that certain members should be required to have an enhanced CRB check and all should be strongly encouraged to do so.

CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

13. In April 2011 we considered a draft of the report on constitutional changes, which the Council will consider today, and made no significant changes to the main draft. Officers were asked to revisit part of the Civic and Ceremonial Protocol, regarding mayoral transport.

MEETINGS WITH THE CEO AND THE LEADER

13. I reported to the Committee in April on my recent meetings with the CEO and the Leader of the Council, which focussed on how the Committee could best support the work of the Council. We asked the Officers to provide briefings at future meetings on forthcoming changes in regulations affecting audit, ethics and probity matters, the Localism Bill and the Council's partnership arrangements, to inform our response to these developments.

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

14. Also in April, we received a report updating us on the Member Development Strategy 2010-2013, and noted that the Member Mentoring scheme was not as widely known as it might be. We endorsed the draft induction programme for new members elected in May 2011, noting that the outcome of the election, and the progress of the Localism Bill, may necessitate some changes to it.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Capital/Revenue

15. Not applicable.

Property/Other

16. Not applicable.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Statutory Power to undertake the proposals in the report:

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

Other Legal Implications:

18. Not applicable.

POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

19. None.

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	Independent Chair of the Standards and Governance Committee			

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Non-confidential appendices are in the Members' Rooms and can be accessed on-line

Appendices

1.	None.
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Documents In Members' Rooms

1.	None.
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Integrated Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject/recommendations in the report require an Integrated Impact Assessment to be carried out.	No
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Other Background Documents

Title of Background Paper(s)

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

1.	None.	
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Integrated Impact Assessment and Other Background documents available for inspection at: Not applicable

WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	None.
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