ST86
FOR DECISION
WARD(S): GENERAL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

31 January 2011

MONITORING OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS BY INDEPENDENT MEMBERS AND PARISH REPRESENTATIVES

REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR (GOVERNANCE)

Contact Officers: Stephen Whetnall/Chris Ashcroft Tel No: 01962 848220/848284

RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This process was introduced in 2002 and has been repeated every two years, the last being in January 2010. On 29 March 2010, the Committee noted the conclusions of the latest exercise and agreed that it should become an annual event, hence this report. Members also suggested a more specific question about how the public participation sessions were handled and this has been included in the Questionnaire (Question 8).

Meetings of Cabinet, Principal Scrutiny Committee and Planning Development Control Committee have been monitored in the past, being those that generate the highest levels of public interest.

As a reminder, the monitoring process involves two of the Independent Members/Parish Representatives (in various combinations) attending selected committee meetings as members of the public. They are not 'mystery shoppers', as this Committee decided that everyone at the meeting to be monitored should be aware of their attendance and their role, which was to observe proceedings from the public viewpoint and make comments regarding the observance by Members of the Code of Conduct and other protocols. The exercise also provided a useful opportunity to comment on a number of general 'housekeeping' issues, such as meeting facilities, signage and acoustics.

The feedback has always proved useful and highlighted areas for improvement, many of which have since been addressed. The Committee is requested to consider whether it wishes similar visits to be carried out in the forthcoming cycle of meetings, as that would be timely in terms of incorporating any agreed amendments into processes etc. to commence in the 2011/12 Municipal Year.

An updated copy of the questionnaire is attached as Appendix A to this report and, if the above is agreed, comments about the questions asked and possible changes would be welcomed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1 That the Independent Members and Parish Representatives be requested to undertake further evaluation of committee meetings to ascertain the level of compliance with the Code of Conduct and other guidance.

2 That the Committee considers whether there is any other form of monitoring of the Council's ethical framework which it would wish to see undertaken.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN (RELEVANCE TO):

An Efficient and Effective Council.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

Minimal travel costs.

RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

None

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Draft Questionnaire for Monitoring Exercise

STANDARDS COMMITTEE - QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MONITORING MEETINGS

(Please circle the best description)

1. How clear was the signage at the Guildhall to indicate where and when the meeting would be held?

   Excellent / Good / Average / Poor / Very Poor

   Further
   Comments…….
   ……
   ……
   ……

2. To what extent was it clear who the Councillors, the officers and (if appropriate) the applicants were?

   Completely / Quite well / Partly / Not at all

   Further
   comments……
   ……
   ……
   ……

3. How good were the facilities in the meeting room? (eg seating and, if appropriate, monitors, projector screens etc)

   Excellent / Good / Average / Poor / Very Poor

   Further
   comments……
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4. Were copies of the agenda available on the public seating?

   Yes / No

   Further
   comments…….
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   ……

5. How clearly was the opportunity for public participation announced at the beginning of the meeting?

   Completely / Quite well / Partly / Not at all

   Further
   comments…….
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6. To what extent did the agenda sheet clearly explain the process of public participation?

   Completely / Quite well / Partly / Not at all

   Further
   comments…….
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7. Were you asked directly by the Committee Administrator or the Chairman if you wanted to speak during public participation?

   Yes / No

   Further
   comments…….
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8. If there was public participation, how did the Chairman deal with it and to what extent were the questions/concerns answered fairly?

   Completely / Quite well / Partly / Not at all

   Further comments……
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9. How well could both the public speakers and the Councillors be heard?

   Completely / Quite well / Partly / Not at all

   Further comments……
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10. Councillors who are not members of the Committee can sometimes contribute to the debate, including Portfolio Holders, Ward Members and the Leader. If applicable, how well was this fact communicated to the public?

    Completely / Quite well / Partly / Not at all

    Further comments……
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11. Following on from question 10 above, and specifically relating to the Planning Committee, to what extent was the Planning Protocol followed (eg: Members of the Committee not voting because of perception of bias/pre-determination or choosing to speak as a Ward Member to advocate a particular view)?

    Completely / Quite well / Partly / Not at all

    Further comments……
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    ……
    ……

12. If any Councillors declared an interest, how well was it made clear what the actual interest was (i.e. personal or personal and prejudicial and a brief mention of the circumstances)?

    Completely / Quite well / Partly / Not at all

    Further comments……
    ……
    ……
    ……

13. Did any Member leave the room after declaring an interest of either type, perhaps after making a statement under Public Participation as permitted by the Code of Conduct?

    Yes / No

    Further comments……
    ……
    ……
    ……

14. When items were debated, how well did the Chairman achieve a fair and balanced discussion?

    Completely / Quite well / Partly / Not at all

    Further comments……
    ……
    ……
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15. How well did the Chairman summarise the debate prior to a decision being made?

    Completely / Quite well / Partly / Not at all

    Further comments……
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    ……

16. How clearly did you understand the actual decision reached by the meeting on each item?

    Completely / Quite well / Partly / Not at all

    Further comments……
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    ……

17. Overall, to what extent was the debate and decision easy to follow for the lay person?

    Completely / Quite well / Partly / Not at all

    Further comments……
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OTHER COMMENTS:

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