

At a meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on FRIDAY, 30TH JUNE, 2006 at 1.00 p.m.

PRESENT:-

Mr. G.N. Cook in the Chair

Councillors Charlton, M. Forbes, Peter Maddison, Mann and L. Scott together with Mr. J.P. Paterson.

Apology for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Wandless (Hetton Town Council).

Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed the new Members to the Committee, namely Councillors Charlton, Peter Maddison and L. Scott.

Members and Officers of the Committee proceeded to introduce themselves to Ms. Lynn Hunt and Mr. Jim Dafter from the Audit Commission, who were attending the meeting as part of the process for the Ethical Governance Audit.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20th February, 2006 (copy circulated) were submitted.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes be confirmed and agreed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Variation of Agenda

The Chairman moved that the agenda be varied to consider the reports on the use of computer facilities and the protocol for the use of Member Websites at the start of the meeting in order to receive a demonstration of the e-Government democracy suite.

2. RESOLVED that the agenda be varied accordingly.

Councillors' Use of Computer Facilities

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) proposing a review of the Council's current protocol on Councillors' Use of Computer Facilities in the light of the proposed roll out of broadband, the e-Government agenda and Councillor blogs.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The City Solicitor briefed the Committee on the report referring to the e-Government Agenda and the ODPM priority outcomes. He advised that he was proposing a revision of the protocol on the use of computer facilities to permit personal use of e-mail and the internet in accordance with strict conditions in order to encourage Members to use their computer facilities.

The City Solicitor highlighted that ICT services would need to create a separate user account with a different name and e-mail address from the Councillors' official details. He also pointed out the safeguards for the use of Council ICT equipment detailed in paragraph 2 of the report.

In response to Members' enquiries, the City Solicitor advised that Members might be asked to pay a small monthly fee in order to cover the cost of the personal usage of the computer facilities and that by having separate e-mail addresses, this would ensure there was a clear separation of personal and Council usage. He added that, should an easier way in which to separate the usage become available, through discussions with colleagues from ICT other than having two separate e-mail addresses, then this would be developed. However if a Member inadvertently used the wrong site for personal use then they would need to report the matter to the Council's ICT Department.

The Chairman commented that Members had been nervous of using Council computer facilities and enquired whether the arrangements would make them more comfortable in returning to using Council equipment.

Councillor L. Scott commented that some Members had purchased their own computer equipment and preferred to use them to access Council services.

Councillor Charlton commented that not all Members would wish to purchase their own computer and that he saw the new arrangements as a compromise. The proposal to introduce a small charge for personal use would make Members feel more comfortable.

The City Solicitor advised that those Members who used their own equipment were entitled to consumables from the Council to cover the cost related to Council work.

Members welcomed the proposal to encourage the use of IT equipment and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that approval be given to making a change in the protocol in principle and that the City Solicitor be instructed to prepare a revised protocol for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee.

Protocol for Use of Member Websites

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) providing a proposed protocol intended to govern Members' use of dedicated individual websites provided and administered by the Council, highlighting some areas of risk and proposals for managing these.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The City Solicitor introduced the report and referred the Committee to the draft protocol attached at Appendix A.

The e-Democracy Project Manager provided the Committee with a demonstration of a Member Website that was under development.

The City Solicitor advised that Officers in his service would be responsible for screening material provided by the Member, before it was uploaded onto the Members' individual site, to ensure the information was compliant with the protocol. He advised that should Members request a link from their website to their blog or another site, technical arrangements would be put in place to ensure that the user of the site was advised that they were leaving the Council's website. Officers would liaise with Councillors on an individual basis to determine what information they would like to include on their Council Website.

In response to Councillor M. Forbes, the City Solicitor advised that proposals for additional resources in Members Services to enhance the necessary office support would be submitted to the Council's Personnel Committee. These staff would undertake the editing and uploading of information for Councillors' Websites together with the services already provided.

Full consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that:-
- (i) the protocol attached at Appendix A be adopted, to apply to each Member's use of the facility, which will not be made available to any Member until they have accepted and returned a signed copy of the protocol to the City Solicitor;
 - (ii) a link to a Members' private blog be offered subject to the technical safeguards outlined in the report; and
 - (iii) a link to another site or sites on subjects likely to be of interest to readers of the site also be offered subject to the same technical safeguards.

Ethical Governance Audit – Draft Specification

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) providing further information on the Ethical Audit which is being undertaken by the Audit Commission and which had commenced in May and inviting Members to give consideration to any other matters that they felt needed to be included in the audit, which could be added to the scope of the review.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Hunt, District Auditor advised that the results of the Survey and Ethical Audit would be reported to the Committee upon completion.

5. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

(Signed) G.N. COOK,
Chairman.