



Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED
All Wards

**FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:
STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

12TH NOVEMBER, 2008

7TH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - LEGAL SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To enable the Committee to review issues arising and action needed following attendance of members and officers at the 7th Annual Assembly of Standards Committees, 13th – 14th October, 2008, Birmingham.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is recommended to review feedback from officers and members who attended the 7th Annual Assembly so as to assess what issues need to be addressed and, where appropriate, included it in the Committee's work programme.

3. REPORT

Independent members, Sheila Brucciani and Mary Ray, Councillor Corrall and four officers attended this year's 7th Annual Assembly of Standards Committees in Birmingham.

The Assembly was the most popular to date and, as expected, proved to be particularly interesting and useful because it was held just six months after the introduction of the Local Assessment of Complaints.

Plenary sessions at the conference included the following topics:

- * The Government's commitment to local standards and its proposals for the future.
- * The Standards Board's view of what local delivery has meant in practice following the introduction of the new local system for complaints in May, 2008.
- * Has the standards framework made a difference? Do the public have any more confidence in members as a result? Opinion formers discussed the results of research and invited debate. Speakers included Ben Page, Managing Director of Ipsos Morry Public Affairs, which is due to speak in Leicester on 28th November.

- * A presentation on what makes the Standards Committee effective; how standards can be raised and moved beyond basic compliance with the Code so as to make a real difference to our community.

A consistent message throughout the conference was that any Authority wishing to be assessed as “excellent” must have a high quality governance framework.

The conference also included a range of optional break out sessions, for example:

- * **Balancing act:** is it possible or even desirable to have a consistent, national approach to managing standards? Should Standards Committees take into account local attitudes?
- * **Delivering local assessment:** A practical session to enable delegates to understand the local assessment process and the key steps involved.
- * **Delivering local investigations:** An explanation of the local investigation process with the use of case examples.
- * **First response:** An explanation as to how to manage the assessment of complex and challenging complaints.
- * **The Code made clear.:** The Code was explained with the use of case studies.
- * **Communicating with communities:** This session provided practical suggestions on how Standards committees can improve communication with the local community.
- * **Questions and answers for Monitoring Officers:** This proved to be a lively and useful session. Monitoring Officers had the opportunity to question senior Standards Board officers. It emerged that there remain serious concerns on sensitive issues such as the provision of information to subject members prior to an Assessment Sub-Committee and that further guidance is needed from the Standards Board.
- * **In confidence:** Case examples were used to provide guidance on the application of the Data Protection Act, Freedom of Information Act etc.
- * **Joining the dots, understanding corporate governance:** This session looked in detail at the relationship between Standards, Scrutiny and Audit Committees.

A self assessment checklist was provided which can be utilised by officers/members both in the Standards Committee and Audit Committee.

The session demonstrated how important it is that Standards, Audit and Scrutiny Committees understand their respective agendas so as to complement each other and provide the Authority with a complete governance framework which enables a proactive, outward looking perspective.

- * **Mediation and action:** This was a practical workshop to explore to what extent mediation can be used in practice as a means of resolving complaints. The session demonstrated that mediation can be used as part of the filtering out of complaints prior to a formal complaint to the Monitoring Officer / Assessment Sub-Committee, but also that it is essential that all parties are willing to sign up to the mediation process and that anyone facilitating the mediation must be appropriately trained and skilled.

- * **Planning ahead:** This workshop took delegates through difficult planning scenarios to demonstrate when and how members can represent their community, also exploring some planning pitfalls. This workshop demonstrated that Leicester's planning code and training for members are fairly well advanced, but also that it would be useful for the Standards Committee to review the code e.g. early 2009.

4. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Financial Implications

None

5.2 Legal Implications

These are covered in the report.

5. BACKGROUND PAPERS – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Conference papers, relevant legislation and guidance.

6. CONSULTATIONS

Members and officers who attended the conference are asked to give further feedback at the meeting on the 12th November.

7. REPORT AUTHOR

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