



Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED
All Wards

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

18TH NOVEMBER, 2009

ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES ON 12TH AND 13TH OCTOBER

REPORT OF THE SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide the Committee with feedback from the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees, to summarise learning points and recommend action to be taken.

2. RECOMMENDATION

To note the feedback from the Assembly as summarised below and to decide on action to be taken.

3. REPORT

The Standards for England's 8th Annual Assembly of Standards Committees was held on 12th and 13th October at Birmingham ICC.

Standards Committee Chairs, Monitoring Officers, Council Leaders and Chief Executives attended workshops, question and answer sessions and debates, not just on Members' Code of Conduct but also on wider issues of ethical governance. The conference was attended by Sheila Brucciani, Independent Chair, Liz Reid-Jones, Head of Democratic Services and Peter Nicholls, Monitoring Officer.

Full session materials are now available for download from the conference website at www.annualassembly.co.uk.

This year's Assembly programme proved to be extremely useful and practical. There was an emphasis on issues such as improving the effectiveness of Standards Committees. Below is a summary of learning points and suggested actions.

Improving the effectiveness of the Standards Committee

- i. Further develop joint working by organising proposed joint training with Leicestershire County Council; for example, on the Planning Code.

- ii. Make best use of the Council's website to promote and explain the work of the Standards Committee and also ensure useful links to other websites such as the Standards Board, the Police Authority, the Fire Authority and Leicestershire County Council.
- iii. Make best use of the proposal to produce an Annual Report so as to enable the Standards Committee to manage its agenda, raise its profile and engage with the Council at all levels. The first draft Annual Report is on the agenda for today's meeting and it is proposed that this be presented by the Independent Chair to Scrutiny Committee, Audit, Cabinet and full Council.

Implementation of the Annual Report and the work programme needs to be more systematic, and reporting by exemption should highlight delays and celebrate success.

- iv. A number of authorities have a lead Cabinet Member who has within their portfolio standards and ethical issues. This can be recommended to Cabinet/ the Leader.
- v. Another best practice idea which can be introduced would be to organise regular meetings between the Independent Chair, Monitoring Officer / Solicitor and Cabinet Lead / Leader and Chief Executive; for example, every quarter.

Independent Chairs can also be invited to attend Cabinet, as is the case in a number of other authorities. Our Independent Chair already attends Council.

The broad aim is to ensure that the Standards Committee is fully integrated into the work of the Council, has an appropriate level of influence and is in a position to contribute to the ethical governance improvement programme at all levels.

Promotion of the work of the Standards Committee

In addition to improving and making best use of the Council's web site the work of the Standards Committee can be promoted. Some authorities have organised road shows but Leicester already has established community meetings which can be used as a forum to promote the work of the Standards Committee. An informative article can also be published within the Council's free newspaper Link. It is recognised that it is important to get the right balance between raising awareness and avoiding the generation of inappropriate complaints.

Induction / development programme for Standards Committee members

Informal induction for new members of Standards Committee is currently provided by the Monitoring Officer but good use can also be made of a development programme specific to the needs of Standards Committee members.

It would also be useful for the Monitoring Officer to meet all new members of Council to make sure they have an understanding of the Code and governance requirements.

Partnership working

This was another high profile issue at the Standards Assembly. It was demonstrated that the Standards Committee can play an important lead role in strengthening governance arrangements, adopted to suit Leicester's local needs.

It is recognised that there is a need for a conflict resolution mechanism on the interface between the Council and partnerships.

Both Standards and Audit Committees need to be closely involved in this partnership work.

Corporate Area Assessment

The Standards Committee can also play a crucial role in developing action, monitoring implementation of improvements to achieve an enhanced CAA rating.

Informal resolution of complaints

Standards for England has recognised that the local complaints systems has proved to be extremely difficult to implement in practice; the system is rather inflexible and so is now promoting best use of informal resolution where appropriate. Today's meeting is receiving a report on this subject.

Carrying out investigations

This is proving to be a highly specialist area. Several sessions at the conference dealt with lessons learnt and how to ensure an investigation can be carried out effectively.

To date Leicester has experienced the need for two investigations which have been carried out by external specialists.

In the meantime, we have trained an in-house group of officers who are now able to deal with an investigation, if required, and we have also provided an investigation service to neighbouring districts. In this way we are building up a useful centre of expertise.

Review of recent case law

Another useful idea would be for the Standards Committee to regularly review recent case law.

4. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

4.1. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications.

4.2 Legal Implications

These are covered in the report.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph References Within information	Supporting
Equal Opportunities Policy	Yes	The Code requires compliance	
Sustainable and Environmental			
Crime and Disorder			
Human Rights Act	Yes	The Code requires compliance	
Elderly/People on Low Income			

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Assembly papers and national guidance.

7. REPORT AUTHOR

Peter Nicholls, Director of Legal Services, x6302