



Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED
Type in Ward

FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:
Standards Committee
Council

16 March 2011
24 March 2011

STANDARDS COMMITTEE SECOND ANNUAL REPORT

Report of the Chair of the Standards Committee

1. Purpose of Report

To note the achievements of the Standards Committee for the period 1.July 2009 - 30.June.2010 and to consider challenges for the year ahead.

2. Recommendations

Members are invited to note the Report and consider the actions for the following year.

3. Report

- 3.1 During this period the Standards Committee met on eight occasions. Of these, six were regular scheduled meetings and two were special meetings held for the purpose of accepting a Report of an Investigation. In addition the Assessment Sub-committee met on two occasions.
- 3.2 Membership of the Committee, which is made up of six elected members and three independent members, varied with several changes of elected members during the period. This presented the Committee with some particular challenges especially the need for training in the quite technical requirements of the Standards Regime legislation. However, all of the members have responded well to the challenges and an element of continuity was maintained by the three independent members and one elected member who has remained on the committee since its inception.
- 3.3 Activities of the Committee
- 3.4 Terms of Reference for the Committee and its Sub-committees were reviewed and redrafted.
- 3.5 The Committee continued its tradition of inviting guests to our meetings. In its first meeting of the period we welcomed the Chief Executive and enjoyed a discussion on the embedding

of ethical standards into the Council's work. We also discussed with her the handling of complaints against elected members highlighting the limitations of the current standards regime which requires a bureaucratic procedural approach rather than allowing for informal methods of dispute resolution.

In September Lord Mayor Councillor Roger Blackmore attended and led a discussion about the Lord Mayor's role in maintaining high standards in Council and supporting new members.

- 3.6 The new Director of Corporate Governance was welcomed during this period and we acknowledged the supportive role played by Peter Nicholls as interim Monitoring Officer.
- 3.7 Much of the work of the Committee has involved receiving and commenting upon Reports relevant to the ethical aspects of the Council's work. Corporate Governance Annual Reports for 2008-9 and 2009-10 were scrutinised during the period and feedback offered. The Audit Commission Ethical Governance Report was welcomed as this praised the work of the Committee and detailed the ways in which Ethical Governance had improved in the Council since 2007 particularly in the high standard of training of members in the Code of Conduct
- 3.8 The Code of Practice for Member involvement in Development Control Decisions and in Pre-Application discussions were reviewed and amendments suggested.

Also discussions were held and revisions suggested to the Code of Practice for Member involvement in Licensing decision making.

- 3.9 Briefings on legislation relevant to the Committees work and a policy briefing on "The public perception of ethics" were received and discussed. A report on the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill prompted a discussion about the Council's process for dealing with petitions.
- 3.10 The Committee also revised the Council script on Member Conduct at Meetings.
- 3.11 In October the Chair attended The Annual Assembly of Standards Committees and presented learning points from that to the Committee. From this a regular update of case law for members was introduced. There was some discussion of how the Standards Committee might be helpfully involved developing ethical criteria for partnership working and development of closer working with neighbouring authorities. The Committee recommended that a Cabinet member take the lead on Standards issues and the Leader of the Council accepted that role. The Chair also took part in a regional workshop to respond to consultation on a prospective New Code of Conduct. Standards for England regular bulletins and publications concerning topics such as Dispensations, and Standards for Blogging were received and noted.
- 3.12 This was a quiet year for complaints against elected members with only 2 complaints reaching the Assessment Sub Committee. By comparison with our neighbouring authorities in the same period there were 3 in Nottingham City and 15 in Derby City. In Leicester there were no breaches of the Code although there was one hearing outstanding which has now been concluded.

3.13 Looking to the Future.

3.14 During the year 2010-11 we will produce written guidance for members who are the subject of a complaint, we will continue to work closely with our neighbouring authorities by making our independent members available to them when needed and sharing ideas about training. We will continue to play an important role in developing the Council's ethical framework.

3.15 There are uncertain times ahead. Prior to The General Election the Conservative party announced its intention to disband the Standards Regime if elected. It is now clear that this will happen probably before April 2012. This provides a good opportunity for the Council to make its own decisions about how to ensure high standards of conduct in the future. This could include putting in place a more flexible system of dealing with complaints. I am confident that, in the coming months, following consultations and discussions a way forward will be found.

4. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

4.1. Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
Steve Charlesworth, Head of Finance (Financial control)

4.2. Legal Implications

There are no additional legal implications.
Peter Nicholls, Director of Legal Services

4.3. Climate Change Implications

This report does not contain any significant climate change implications and therefore should not have a detrimental effect on the Council's climate change targets.
Helen Lansdown, Senior Environmental Consultant - Sustainable Procurement

5. Other Implications

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/ NO	Paragraph/References Within the Report
Equal Opportunities	N	
Policy	N	
Sustainable and Environmental	N	
Crime and Disorder	N	
Human Rights Act	N	
Elderly/People on Low Income	N	
Corporate Parenting	N	

Health Inequalities Impact	N	
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6. Background Papers – Local Government Act 1972

Nil

7. Report Author

Sheila Brucciani, Independent Chair of the Standards Committee