

Leicester  
City Council

**WARDS AFFECTED  
ALL WARDS - CORPORATE ISSUE**

**FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:  
Standards Committee  
Council**

**23 June 2003  
3 July 2003**

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**STANDARDS COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT**

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**Report of the Town Clerk and Corporate Director of  
Resources, Access and Diversity**

**1. Purpose of Report**

To provide a report on the work of the Standards Committee over the past year.

**2. Summary**

- 2.1. The Standards Committee, at its meeting on 31 August 2002, when considering its current role and ways of raising its profile, agreed in principle, with the concept of an Annual Report to Council, but noting that individual cases could not be discussed. This is the first such Annual Report.

The full text of the Annual Report is contained at Appendix A. Members will note that the report covers the following areas of activity:-

- \* Training and Development of Councillors
- \* Complaints against Members
- \* Dispensations
- \* "Audit Committee for Standards" Role
- \* Monitoring of Complaints

**3. Recommendations**

Members are asked to comment upon the proposed Annual Report with a view to endorsing a final version for bringing before Council at its meeting on 3 July 2003.

**4. Headline Financial and legal Implications**

The work of the Standards Committee is aimed at maintaining the highest levels of probity and ethics within the Council, in accordance with the National Code of Conduct, as incorporated within the Council's Political Conventions

(i) Financial Implications

None

(ii) Legal Implications

As in paragraph 4.

(iii) Other Implications

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

**5. Background Papers – Local Government Act 1972**

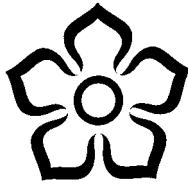
Standards Board for England – Guidance on Standards Committee.

**6. Consultation**

None.

**5. Report Author/Officer to contact:**

Charles Poole  
Service Director (Democratic Services)  
extn. 7015



Leicester  
City Council

## APPENDIX A

### STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2002/3

#### 1. Introduction

The Local Government Act 2000 (Section 53) requires the City Council to set up a Standards Committee. The Relevant Authorities (Standards Committee) Regulations 2001 set out the rules governing the size and membership of the Standards Committee and how it should run its business. It has five 'statutory functions'. It must:-

- give the Council advice on adopting a local Code of Conduct;
- monitor the effectiveness of the Code;
- train members on the Code, or arrange such training;
- promote and maintain high standards of conduct for members; and,
- help members to follow the Code of Conduct.

Standards Committees can also grant 'dispensations' in relation to prejudicial interests in prescribed circumstances.

#### 2. Membership

The Council established a Standards Committee in advance of the legislative requirement. In so doing, it chose to appoint two Independent Members (Ms Jill Bellingham and Mrs. Caroline Roberts) in accordance with a selection process which met, in all respects, the requirements of the subsequent Regulations concerning such appointments. These two Independent Members, recruited in May 2001 for an initial period of three years, were also appointed as the Co-Chairs. The remaining membership of the Committee during this period has been Councillors Coley, Draycott and O'Brien.

It is also worthy of note that Caroline Roberts has also sat on the National Steering Group which has shaped the Second Annual Assembly of Standards Committees, held at ICC, Birmingham, 9-10 June 2003.

### 3. Business Conducted

During the 2002/03 Municipal Year the Committee has considered a range of activities, as outlined below. It must be said, however, that there has been an underlying frustration of the Committee due to successive Regulations limiting its role from that anticipated, including its limited capability in the area of Dispensations. The time taken for the production of draft 'Section 66' Regulations, which would have the effect of devolving routine investigations away from the National Standards Board (via their Ethical Standards Officers) to local Standards Committees for determination, has also been disappointingly slow.

#### 3.1. Training and Development of Councillors

In keeping with the statutory function of the Committee, the most appropriate means and extent for the training and development of Councillors in matters of ethics and probity has been explored by the Committee.

As a result of their consideration, a number of initiatives have taken place:-

- ★ A briefing session for persons interested in becoming a Councillor at the May 2003 elections was held in October 2002. At that event, the Town Clerk led a specific session on Ethics and Probity, thereby stressing, from the very first expressions of interest, the importance placed by the Council on maintaining the highest standards of conduct and probity
- ★ Election Candidate Briefing Packs contained a copy of the Declaration of Acceptance of Office which all Members are required to sign, along with a copy of the National Code of Conduct and a Summary of the Council's Political Conventions. These issues were reinforced at the associated Candidates Briefing Session.
- ★ Declaration of Acceptance of Office and Induction Workshops on Ethics and Probity. Although implementation falls within the new Municipal Year, Members of the Standards Committee also gave detailed consideration to the planning and preparation of the induction and training of newly elected Members. As a result, they proposed the ceasing of the practice of Members signing the Declaration of Acceptance of Office at the Count and moving it to an Induction event for all Members on Ethics and Probity. (In the event, this change worked extremely well, with the Ethics and Probity event attended by Members, Corporate Directors and key staff associated with the decision making processes, the best attended sessions of the whole Induction programme.) These sessions were both attended by and introduced by the Co-Chairs of the Standards Committee – again signalling the importance placed by the Committee on appropriate training and development of Members.

- ★ Personal Training and Development Plans for Members Arrangements are currently being piloted whereby the training and development needs of each Councillor can be both identified and, thereafter, addressed. As part of that process, the Standards Committee have identified that the assessment of needs should include a core element relating to ethics and probity. In addition, the Committee has also stressed the maintenance of the annual provision of training for those Members who sit on the Development Control Committee, to conform with both Government guidance and best practice.

### 3.2. Complaints against Members

The Committee has reviewed the approach to complaints against Members, in the light of the Standards Board's procedures. The approach adopted by the Committee was to enable as much flexibility as possible in the filtering of possible complaints prior to referral to the National Standards Board. This, in practice, increasingly fits towards the model now being adopted by the National Standards Board (in conjunction with the Section 66 Regulations which provide updated procedures for the handling of complaints against Members).

The Standards Committee also met, in July 2002, to hear and determine a series of complaints lodged against a Councillor prior to the acceptance by Council of the New National Code. The outcome was reported by Caroline Roberts to full Council at its September 2002 meeting.

### 3.3. Dispensations

Although the Standards Committee have powers, by Regulation, to issue Dispensations to Members in prescribed circumstances, an examination of the Regulations, prior to applying them for the Annual Budget Meeting in March 2003, identified some basic flaws in the applicability now acknowledged by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. As a result, the Council has taken the view that Dispensations by the Standards Committee are extremely limited and do not have a general applicability.

### 3.4. "Audit Committee for Standards" Role

As part of the Annual Corporate Governance Review process, the Standards Committee has determined to fulfil the role of Audit Committee for Standards. This, in practice, requires the Committee to formally sign off the probity and integrity elements of Corporate Governance, having received and examined documentary evidence in support of the view being put forward in key areas. Key areas to be included in this approach include:-

- ★ Political Conventions, including Members Code of Conduct (review, public and application)
- ★ Officers Code of Conduct
- ★ Register of Members Interests (review/monitoring)

- ★ Declarations of Interest (Dispensations, monitoring, update)
- ★ Register of Members and Officers Gifts and Hospitality (review)
- ★ Member training and development (both provision and attendance) on matters of ethical conduct, including training in Development Control matters
- ★ Member conformance to Data Protection provisions
- ★ Complaints against Members (monitoring)

### 3.5. Monitoring of Complaints

The Standards Committee has introduced a process of regular monitoring of complaints against Councillors, including their progress through the National Standards Board, and outcome, in order that any trends or other issues can be identified and necessary action taken.

Jill Bellingham        )  
Caroline Roberts     )        Co-Chairs, Standards Committee