

COUNCIL REPORT	AGENDA ITEM 8
	PUBLIC REPORT

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ANNUAL REPORT OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S	
FROM : STANDARDS COMMITTEE	
That Council:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. notes the work carried out by the Standards Committee, and endorses and supports the priorities for the coming year. 2. supports regular short training sessions immediately prior to the commencement of meetings of Full Council, as set out at paragraph 4.4 below. 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is submitted to Council following a referral from the Standards Committee.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to brief Council on the work carried out during the year by the Standards Committee, and also to obtain the support of Council for the work to be carried out in the year ahead.
- 2.2 The Standards Committee has a responsibility to remind Members of their obligations under the Code of Conduct for Members, a copy of which is included at Part 5, Section 1, of the Council's Constitution.

3. THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE: YEAR TO APRIL 2009.

- 3.1 The main role of the Standards Committee is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct throughout its authority. One of its aims is to create a sense of "ethical wellbeing" in the authority. The Standards Committee agrees with the Standards Board view that there needs to be a culture of high standards in every authority, and that each authority has the opportunity to reinforce its position as a leader in standards of conduct, setting an example to other bodies it works with, and to the community at large.
- 3.2 For the year to April 2009, the main focus of the Standards Committee has been on the implementation of the new regime for handling complaints against elected members. The committee underwent an intensive training programme, with 3 separate training sessions being arranged for members of the Standards Committee. The new regime requires the Standards Committee to handle complaints rather than them being referred to the Standards Board, in the first instance. During the first year, a total of 11 complaints was received, of which 8 have been referred for investigation. Of the remaining 3, in one case there was found to be no breach, in another there was insufficient information to investigate, and as the complainant was anonymous it was impossible to follow this up, and in the remaining case, the Committee decided that it would be appropriate for the member concerned to receive individual training from the Monitoring Officer.

- 3.3 An additional item of work for the year to date has related to the implementation of Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for elected members. This has been an extensive piece of work, which has resulted in the recommendation to the Executive that a policy be adopted that requires checks to be carried out following a risk assessments of all roles to which members might be appointed within the authority.

4. STANDARDS COMMITTEE: THE YEAR AHEAD

- 4.1 The focus for the year ahead is on promoting a wider understanding of the need to encourage high standards of ethical behaviour throughout the Council. It is the responsibility of the Standards Committee to ensure that all members are trained in relation to matters of ethical conduct. All members are required to sign an undertaking to comply with the Code of Conduct, and it is therefore crucial that there is an understanding of the workings and implications of it. Several attempts have been made to organise training sessions in relation to matters of conduct, during the year to date, but the response has been disappointing.
- 4.2 To enable the Standards Committee to fulfil its obligation to ensure all members are appropriately trained in matters of ethical conduct, it is proposed to hold short sessions of up to 20 minutes each, at the start of some Council meetings during the year. It is hoped that all members will endorse this approach, which should limit the need for lengthy additional training sessions, and yet meet the need to promote high standards of ethical behaviour.
- 4.3 A further focus will be on promoting the work of the standards committee more widely, both within the authority and externally. This will be in conjunction with attempts to promote democracy more widely, and to work more closely with the audit committee, and scrutiny committees, as the work of these committees should complement each other.

5. CONSULTATION

Consultation has taken place within the Standards Committee, but no wider consultation is necessary.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Standards Committee believes that Council's endorsement of the contents of this report will enable it to fulfil the function of promoting high standards of ethical behaviour within the authority.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The Council is required to set up a Standards Committee by the Local Government Act 2000. The Council could maintain a Standards Committee which has a more limited vision and work programme. This option was rejected because it is important that the Council has a strong Standards Committee to encourage and maintain a high standard of ethical behaviour. To do otherwise would restrict the Council's ability to operate effectively.

8. IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial or legal implications, other than those contained within the body of the report.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

None