
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

9 March 2007

Report of the Head of Civic, Democratic and Legal Services

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Summary

1. This report sets out a review of the work carried out by the Standards Committee at City of York Council during the municipal year 2006/07.

Background

2. The Standards Committee has met formally on five occasions during the municipal year 2006/07 on 19 May 2006, 6 October 2006, 17 November 2006, 26 January 2007 and 9 March 2007. In addition, there have been some informal meetings where the Standards Committee has considered the recruitment of a new Chair for the Committee and the consultation document on the proposed amendments to the Members' Code of Conduct.
3. The Standards Committee has an approved work plan, which is reviewed at each meeting, to assess the progress made against agreed areas for consideration. The most up-to-date version of the work plan is attached to this report at Annex 1.
4. In addition, the Standards Committee has continued to review and monitor advice from the Standards Board for England regarding interpretation of the Code of Conduct for Members and attended training on Local Investigations. The Monitoring Officer has reported verbally to the Standards Committee in respect of complaints to the Standards Board for England regarding the conduct of Members in the York district where such information is in the public domain.
5. During the municipal year 2006/07 the Monitoring Officer has been notified of five allegations reported to the Standards Board for England against City of York Council elected Members. On each of these matters the Standards Board for England has determined that a breach of the Code had not occurred. The Monitoring Officer is not notified of allegations made against Parish Councillors unless they are referred to the Monitoring Officer for local investigation. There have been no referrals during the municipal year post 2006/07.

6. Set out below are the specific tasks the Standards Board agreed to undertake, together with other issues that have arisen during this municipal year.

Recruitment of a new Independent Chair for the Standards Committee

At the end of the last municipal year Roger McMeeking stood down as the Independent Chair of the Standards Committee. A recruitment exercise was undertaken to appoint a new Chair. Christine Bainton was appointed as the new Independent Chair of the Standards Committee at the Council meeting on 5 October 2006.

Tenth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life

The Standards Committee have considered the Tenth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life and specifically the recommendations on public appointments, the ethical standards framework for local government, proportionality, culture and how the seven principles of public life can be embedded into organisational culture.

Review of the Complaints Procedure

The Standards Committee has continued to monitor the progress in the review of the Council's Complaints Procedure and both Rita Leaman (Independent Member of the Standards Committee) and the Head of Civic, Democratic and Legal Services continue to attend the Project Team meetings to provide a link with the Standards Committee. The Standards Committee expects to comment formally on the proposed amendments shortly.

National Standards Board for England Conference

The Head of Civic, Democratic and Legal Services attended the Standards Board for England National Conference on 16 and 17 October 2006. The main issue for discussion at the Conference were the proposed changes to the Code of Conduct and the Role of the Standards Board for England. A report on the issues raised at the Conference was considered by the Standards Committee at their meeting on 17 November 2006.

Advice to Elected Members and Senior Officers regarding activities during the pre-Election period

The Standards Committee had a discussion on issues around the relationship of Officers and Members and activities during the pre-election period. The Standards Committee considered a letter drafted by the Head of Civic, Democratic and Legal Services, which was subsequently circulated to all Members and Senior Officers.

Ethical Governance Audit

The Standards Committee has considered the proposed Ethical Governance Audit and reiterated its commitment to participating and supporting progression of the Audit. In addition, consideration would be given as to how the Standards

Committee can lead in any improvement programme identified as a result of the Audit.

Amendments to the National Code of Conduct for Local Authority Elected Members

The Standards Committee has met and discussed in detail the proposed amendments to the Code of Conduct and has submitted a formal response.

Consultation

7. The Standards Committee continues to consult with Parish Councils through their representatives on the Committee.

Options

8. Not applicable – this report is for information.

Analysis

9. Not applicable – this report is for information.

Corporate Priorities

10. The effectiveness of the Standards Committee is a core part of the Council's ethical governance arrangements. As such, it makes a contribution towards improving leadership at all levels and providing clear, consistent direction to the organisation.

Implications

11. There are no Financial, HR, Equalities, Legal, Crime and Disorder, IT, Property or other implications in this report.

Risk Management

12. The functions of the Standards Committee contribute to ensuring appropriate ethical arrangements are in place and understood and as such reduce the risk of complaints made against the Council regarding its decision-making processes.

Recommendations

13. 1) That Members of the Standards Committee note and comment on the Annual Report

Reason: To ensure the Annual report reflects the activities of the Standards Committee during the municipal year 2006/07

- 2) That Members of the Standards Committee approve the report, together with any amendments, to be referred to Full Council.

Reason: To comply with the provisions of the Council's Constitution.

Contact Details

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Report Approved

Date 26 February 2007

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

None

Wards Affected: List wards or tick box to indicate all

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

None

Annexes

Annex 1 - The Standards Committee Work Plan