

Standards Committee Annual Review

April 2008 to March 2009

The Standards Committee

Independent members

The Reverend Paul Lipscomb (Chair)

Mr Fred Ashmore

Mr Mike Field (Vice-Chair)

Dr Henna Khan

Elected members

Councillor Derek Cryer

Councillor Brian Hewitt

Councillor Latif Khan

Councillor Mewa Mann

Councillor Natasa Pantelic

Councillor James Walsh

Parish Council representatives

Britwell Councillor Nicoline Brandligt

Colnbrook with Poyle Parish Councillor

Laurie Tucker

Wexham Court Parish Councillor Dalip Rajput

The council at its meeting on 22nd July 2008 approved changes to the standards committee's constitution to meet the requirements of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008.

These changes included increasing the number of parish council representatives on the committee from one to three. Parish councillors Nicoline Brandligt and Laurie Tucker were appointed by the council to the committee on 16th December 2008.

The committee is serviced by Steven Quayle, monitoring officer and June Cook, member services manager.

The committee is programmed to meet four times a year in public. Committee agenda papers, reports and minutes are available on the council's website at www.slough.gov.uk.

Chair's comments

The council set up an Ethical Standards Working Party some ten years ago to commence the development of a suite of ethical governance documents and to deal with complaints about member behaviour. After the passing of the Local Government Act 2000 the current standards committee has continued and refined this role and it has come a long way since those early days: from developing and promoting the council's comprehensive ethical framework, hearing and deciding complaints referred to the monitoring officer by the Standards Board for England and now handling all complaints locally in a fair but robust manner.

We anticipate the imminent introduction of an amended Members' Code of Conduct and a new statutory Code of Conduct for Employees and these matters will concentrate our minds in the forthcoming municipal year.

However, the committee will continue to review and where necessary revise the council's comprehensive ethical framework and seek further improvements in the behaviour of members at council/committee meetings.

As I have said previously, party political considerations will play no part in the work of the committee or its sub-committees and whatever we do will be done with fairness and justice as our guiding principle.

What the Standards Board does

The Standards Board was established by the Local Government Act 2000 to help build confidence in local democracy by:

- Promoting high standards of ethical behaviour.
- Overseeing and promoting the Local Code of Conduct.
- Receiving and investigating complaints and misconduct referred to it by local standards committees.
- Providing national guidance to councillors, local standards committees and council monitoring officers.

It is now regarded as the 'strategic regulator' of ethical issues within local government.

What do we do?

- Promote and maintain high standards of conduct of borough councillors, parish councillors, co-opted members and diocesan representatives.
- Monitor the operation of the council's ethical framework.

- Advise and train councillors on conduct issues, personal and prejudicial interests, bias/predetermination and gifts and hospitality.
- Assess, review and determine complaints through sub-committees set up by the committee.
- Give advice and guidance on the “whistleblowing” policy and procedure.
- Monitor the performance of councillors.
- Monitor the reporting of gifts and hospitality.
- Observe the workings of council and parish council meetings.
- Publish an annual review of our work.

What have we done?

In 2008/09 we:

- Responded to the Government’s consultation paper entitled “Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power Codes of Conduct of Local Authority Members and Employees”.
- Reviewed the performance of borough councillors particularly their attendance at meetings and training.
- Continued to review and update our work programme.
- Considered and assessed three complaints made against councillors and determined that no investigations should take place through the Standards (Assessment) Sub-Committee.

- Reported on the outcome of meetings between the chief executive and group leaders on member behaviour at meetings of the council.
- Approved amendments to the council's constitution to facilitate the local assessment and review of complaints by sub-committees established by the committee.
- Increased the membership of the committee to 13 to ensure representation from all three parish councils within the borough.
- Reviewed the "whistleblowing" policy and procedure.

The number of complaints has substantially declined as member behaviour at meetings has improved.

Year	2008/09
Complaints	3
Referred for investigation	0
No further action	3
Breach	0

The future

It is anticipated that much of our work for the municipal year 2009/10 will be concerned with the implementation of proposed changes to the Local Code of Conduct to extend its application to members' conduct in a non-official capacity in limited circumstances and the consideration of a new national Employee Code of Conduct.

In addition we will continue to develop the council's ethical framework documentation and ensure that it complies with best practice.

In summary we will:

- Review the council's Member and Officer Relations Code.
- Consider the data gathered during 2008/09 under the member's performance monitoring arrangements and the registration of gifts and hospitality.
- Provide further training and development on the new provisions of the Local Code of Conduct and the assessment, review and determination of complaints.
- Continue our work with the parish councils.
- Draw up an informal reconciliation/mediation process to aid the early resolution of complaints.

For further information please contact:

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