

Standards Committee

AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Report Title	STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND – ANNUAL CONFERENCE 12-13 October 2009
--------------	---

Date of Meeting:	17 December 2009
Directorate:	Borough Solicitor & Monitoring Officer
Ward(s)	All

1. Summary

To provide the Committee with an update of the key issues considered at the Standards Board for England, annual conference.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is requested to note the report and determine whether the Committee would like to make any changes to the way it currently operates.

- 2.1 The committee is requested to note the report, in particular the Chair's note of key points attached at appendix 1.
- 2.2 The committee is requested to have a general discussion on whether any changes to the way the committee currently operates should be made having considered all appendices to the report.

3. Report Background

- 3.1 Through a series of Information Sessions, Workshops and Discussion Forums the Annual Assembly meets to:
 - 3.1.1 give delegates the chance to share their good practice examples and talk through experiences of managing the practicalities of the local standards framework
 - 3.1.2 discuss strategic issues for ethical governance, such as engaging leadership, building an effective standards committee and getting to grips with political parties.

- 3.1.3 focus on giving standards committees, the knowledge and practical resources needed to promote high standards and enhance the reputation of local government.
- 3.2 Both the Monitoring Officer and the Chair of the standards committee attended the annual assembly and the Chair of the standards committee made a note of the main points made by each individual speaker at the Annual Assembly meeting. These are attached as appendix 1.
- 3.3 The main points to note from the Annual Assembly meeting are:
- a) The address of Dr Robert Chilton, chair of Standards for England, who said:
- “It’s clear that there’s a great appetite to see the local standards framework deliver the maximum benefit to local people.
- “Standards for England is now looking hard at how the system can be optimised to deliver proportionate, effective, value-for-money oversight of standards of conduct among local elected members.”
- b) Conference delegates enthusiastically shared these aims. Many interesting questions were raised, good practice shared and valuable feedback given. The response from delegates was good, and it was clear that commitment to the future of the standards framework was strong. At a time when public trust in politics is taking further blows, the efforts of the community of standards committee members to help build trust in local government was recognised.
- 3.4 The Chief Executive of Standards Board for England highlighted the conclusions of the Annual Review for 2008/9. A copy of her address is attached as appendix 2. In particular the Committee will note that the Chief executive of the Standards Board reports areas of particular concern from local authority returns as follows:
- 3.4.1 While half of all complaints are dismissed at initial assessment, significantly more than under the previous regime are being investigated. And two thirds of all those investigations are revealing no breach of the Code. She concluded that this was a large number and that too high a proportion of full-blown investigations that conclude there is no case to answer does damage to the reputation of the framework.
- 3.4.2 In a small number of authorities, taking on the role of standards overseer for their local parish and town councils has been onerous. However 80 per cent of parishes have never had a single complaint.
- 3.4.3 She also discussed hot topics such as:
- (i) other action
 - (ii) best practice
 - (iii) parishes
 - (iv) Standards in local partnerships
 - (v) Standards committees working together
 - (vi) Training
 - (vii) Communications

- (viii) General election
- (ix) Revised Code
- (x) Risk
- (xi) Quality
- (xii) Cost
- (xiii) Time taken
- (xiv) Sanctions
- (xv) Vexatious/tit for tat complaints.

3.5 Notes of main points regarding the experiences of York City Council and Rossendale Borough Council and Leeds City Council and London Borough of Hackney Standards Committee are also included and the Committee is asked to take note of the main points.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Resources and Risk

There are none- apart from, the resources needed to arrange training for members on any points arising.

4.2 Legal

No specific points to mention at this time

4.3 Other Implications

By keeping abreast of Government responses to consultations such as these members will find it easier to perform their tasks on the various sub-committees, which are involved in the determination of any issues that may arise.

5. Background Papers

None

Report Author and Title: Nikolas Jacob, Solicitor, Borough Solicitor's office and Monitoring Officer

Telephone and Email: 837334 ffernandes@northampton.gov.uk