



Tuesday 2 June 2009




Confidence in local democracy





















## Annual return

Submitted As Final

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## Independent overview

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Does the standards committee have Terms of Reference?

Yes

What help do members receive on following the Code of Conduct?

A copy of the Standards Board for England Guidance. A copy of the Council's Code of Conduct for Members. Group training on the Code of Conduct as part of the induction process, followed by update training and one-to-one training for those unable to attend the group sessions.

Does the standards committee have a forward work plan?

Yes

If yes, who outside of the standards committee is involved in agreeing the forward work plan? Please explain below.

The work plan is developed by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Standards Committee and is informed by changes in legislation, addressing issues raised as part of the complaints process and ensuring our constitution and processes are up to date and effective.

Is the standards committee given a role in reviewing amendments to the Authority's Constitution (or Standing Orders where appropriate)?

Yes

If yes, when was the last review undertaken and what was the standards committee's role in the review? Please explain below.

May 2008 a joint Standards Committee and Constitution Working Party meeting was held to review the Constitution in respect of the new local assessment arrangements and role of the Standards Committee. There is an annual review and the Standards Committee has been involved in this via the member/officer questionnaire on the constitution, ethical standards and corporate governance; the results of the questionnaire were reported to the Standards Committee and discussed by them at some length with recommendations being made to the Council's Constitution Working Party which the Standards Committee Chairman and other SC Members have attended in the past and actively participated in. The SC Chairman also makes concerns known to the Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer and these are followed up and reported back.

## Standards committee meetings.

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Please use the table below to indicate how many times between 01/04/2008 and 31/03/2009 the standards committee has met and for what reasons.

<b>Reason for meeting</b>	<b>Number of times met between 01/04/2008 and 31/03/2009</b>
General meeting of whole standards committee	4
Training	3
Assessment sub-committee	6
Review sub-committee	3
Consideration meeting	3
Hearing	2
Other	2



## Standards committee - annual report

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Does the standards committee produce an annual report on its own work?

Yes

Is the annual report received by a meeting of the full authority?

Yes

Is the annual report sent to all members?

Yes

Is the annual report sent to all senior officers?

Yes

How is the annual report publicised to the general public?

The annual report is circulated and published with the Standards Committee Agenda and Council Agenda. It is made available to the public at these meetings and is published on the Council's website. We email members of the press a link to the website when we publish agendas for these meetings.



### Standards committee - promoting standards

What else does the standards committee do to communicate the role of the standards committee and the importance of high standards internally within the authority to members and officers?

The Chairman attended a Senior Managers' Forum to promote and raise awareness of ethical standards and the complaints process. In response to suggestions in the replies to the member officer questionnaire, the Standards Committee has requested that employee induction includes a section on the importance of this and the basic elements of the framework to facilitate a more united front in improving standards of conduct.

What else has the standards committee done to promote confidence in local democracy to the wider public?

Published guidance on making a complaint against a councillor. Extensive press coverage of local hearings. It has agreed to ensure that all Sub-Committees involved with investigations and hearings comprise a majority of independent members so that the public can be confident that personal and political loyalty does not feature in the Sub-Committees' deliberations.

Has the authority, or the standards committee in particular, considered how it will monitor and ensure high standards of behaviour when the authority is working in partnership with other organisations?

Yes

Please provide examples.

The principles and some provisions of the Code have been incorporated by the Authority into its Strategic Partnership working arrangements document.



### Standards committee - training

Between 01/04/2008 and 31/03/2009, has the authority assessed the training and development needs of members in relation to their responsibilities on standards of conduct?

Yes

What training needs were identified?

Training on Code of Conduct and local assessment of complaints was identified as part of the Councillors induction training. Good Governance and Commissioning Framework training was identified through a Good Governance Diagnostic Audit which the Council carried out. Training needs are also identified through personal development planning which each councillor.

Please provide a list of training and development opportunities that have been provided to members and officers in the period from 01/04/2008 and 31/03/2009, that are relevant to ensuring high standards. Your list should include any training that relates to the operation of the local standards framework, e.g. local assessment, hearings etc.

Standards local assessment training Standards training, conducting hearings well Good Governance and commissioning framework Code of Conduct update (group session, plus one-to-ones were available to all members and have been held through the year)



## Leadership

How often has the standards committee, or its chair, met the chief executive to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009)?

Two

Please also provide an overview of what the meetings were about.

Introduction and signing declaration of acceptance of office. Attended the Senior Managers' Forum to raise awareness of ethical standards. Raised awareness of members who had not attended refresher training on the Code of Conduct. The Chairman has also met twice with the Deputy Chief Executive/Corporate Support Commissioner to discuss the working arrangements and support to the Standards Committee.

How often has the standards committee, or its chair, met the leader of the council to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009)?

None

Please also provide an overview of what the meetings were about.

How often has the standards committee, or its chair, met the other party group leaders to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009)?

None

Please also provide an overview of what the meetings were about.

Does the standards committee, or its chair, have regular access to the monitoring officer? How regular?

Yes. Meetings are held at least three times a year with the Chair/Vice-Chair/Monitoring Officer/Executive Head of Governance/Clerk to the Standards Committee to discuss improvements to Standards Committee arrangements and raise issues regarding ethical standards.

How many times in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009) has the standards committee chair been invited to address a full authority meeting?

None

Does the monitoring officer sit on the Corporate Management Team, or equivalent?

No

If no, please describe in what ways, if any, the monitoring officer has access to the Corporate Management Team.

The Constitution requires that the Monitoring Officer has access to the Commissioning Officer Group and has been amended to place responsibility on all senior officers to ensure that the MO/Legal Services Manager are fully involved in relevant reports to members. The Monitoring Officer can raise issues with the Commissioning Officer Group as and when required either in person or via the Deputy Chief Executive/Corporate Support Commissioner or the Operational Support Commissioner.

Has an executive member (or senior member where appropriate) been given portfolio responsibility for standards?

No



## **Complaints**

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Can the public access information, from the authority website, about how to make a complaint against a member?

Yes

What else has the authority done to advertise the complaint process on member conduct to the general public?

Published the statutory notice in the local newspaper. Published a complaints booklet which is available at local libraries, public counters and on the Council's website. There has also been extensive press coverage of local complaints raising public awareness of this process.

Has the authority sought feedback from any of those people involved in an allegation of member misconduct about their satisfaction with the member conduct complaint process (for example the complainant, witnesses or person against whom the allegation was made)? Please choose from responses below.

Yes

How does the authority communicate the outcome of investigations into member conduct to:

a) members

Via standard letters and decision notices.

b) officers

Via standard letters and decision notices.

c) the general public

Via standard letters and decision notices and statutory public notices where appropriate.

How does the authority communicate the outcome of allegations into member conduct which have NOT resulted in an investigation (for example those allegations which have not been referred for investigation and those allegations which have resulted in other action) to:

a) members

Via standard letters and decision notices.

b) officers

Via standard letters and decision notices.

c) the general public

Via standard letters and decision notices to the complainant only. We do not publish details of complaints not referred for investigation.



## **Member officer relations**

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Does the authority have a protocol for relations between members and officers?

Yes

How is the protocol communicated to officers and members?

It is available on the Council's website as part of the Constitution. Officers and members are also made aware of the local protocol as part of their induction.

What is the mechanism for reviewing the effectiveness of this protocol?

This is actively done each year via the constitution review panel and council meeting and amendments suggested in the light of experience and comments made. The Monitoring Officer monitors complaints from both officers and members and would revise the protocol if it was clear that it was not working. He may also arrange for further training to raise awareness of the protocol.

Does the authority include training on the importance of high standards of behaviour in the inductions of new members and officers?

Yes

Does the authority have informal mechanisms for dealing with member/officer and member/member disputes?

Yes

Please provide details of any mechanisms and, if possible, provide an example where this has been used.

The council uses mediation to try to informally resolve issues with member/officer or member/member disputes. An example of this was where a Councillor had approached a member of staff outside of work wishing to discuss council business. He repeatedly entered her office requesting information without making an appointment. The Executive Head of Governance and Democratic Services Manager mediated a meeting between the councillor and officer and agreed a positive way forward raising awareness of staff pressures and protocols for requesting information.



### Registering member interests

Is the member register of interests accessible to the public on the authority website?

Yes

Is the register of gifts and hospitality available to the public on the authority website?

No

What does the authority do to signal to members the importance of declaring interests and completing the register of interests and the register of gifts and hospitality?

The register is kept in a book and made available for public inspection on request. We advise members of the importance of registering and declaring interests, gifts and hospitality through training. We send out a reminder every six months for them to check their register of members interest entry on the website.



### Officer conduct

Does the authority have a code of conduct for senior officers?

Yes

Does the authority compile a register of senior officers' interests?

Yes

If yes, is the register of senior officers' interests available to the public on the authority website?

No. Officers' interests are kept by the Human Resources Department and officers are expected to declare any interest and act in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Employees which has been adopted locally by the Council.

Does the authority compile a register of senior officers' gifts and hospitality?

Yes

If yes, is the senior officers' register of gifts and hospitality available to the public on the authority website?

No



### Optional questions

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The following questions are optional; you do not have to complete them if you do not wish to. However, this information would be useful to us in helping us to raise ethical standards.

On what issues, if any, would you appreciate more support or guidance on from the Standards Board for England?

The Standards Board for England, the Improvement and Development Agency and the Audit Commission have developed a toolkit that authorities can use to assess the ethical governance arrangements in their authority, and also to identify improvements.

Has your authority used the ethical governance toolkit?

Yes



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