



Report No: **120/2009** Public Agenda Item: **Yes**

Title: **The Role of the Standards Committee**

Wards Affected: **All Wards in Torbay**

To: **Standards Committee** On: **11 June 2009**

Key Decision: **No**

Change to Budget: **No** Change to Policy Framework: **No**

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- 1. What we are trying to achieve and the impact on our customers**
 - 1.1 To improve standards of probity and to boot public trust and confidence in the Council.
- 2. Recommendation(s) for decision**
 - 2.1 To select any of the options identified in paragraph A1.2 considered worth developing.
- 3. Key points and reasons for recommendations**
 - 3.1 To improve standards and probity.

For more detailed information on this proposal please refer to the supporting information attached.

Keith Stevens
Monitoring Officer

Supporting information to Report 120/2009

A1. Introduction and history

A1.1 The Standards Board and the Audit Commission encourage Standards Committees to be proactive and demonstrate that they are at the forefront of maintaining and improving high standards of conduct in the conduct of the authority's business, particularly in relation to members.

A1.2 The following are features which have been practised by authorities and their Standards Committees elsewhere, although some of them are more properly the remit of other bodies in the Council, notably the Audit Committee. The Committee is RECOMMENDED to consider any options which it would wish to be developed from amongst the following:

(i) Meetings between the three principal statutory officers to discuss ethics matters;

(ii) formation of a network of officers in departments responsible for assisting the Monitoring Officer role;

(iii) formation of a network of nearby Monitoring Officers and Standards Committee Chairs to promote good practice and influence national developments;

(iv) creation of a supplementary code of ethics for both members and officers, regularly amended to reflect changing circumstances, and referred to as a matter of course during conduct of the Council's business;

(v) monitoring matters related to ethics, e.g. whistleblowing, introduction and maintenance of new Officer Codes of Conduct, monitoring of complaints systems and co-ordinating suggestions for improvements;

(vi) use as a respected ad hoc reference point by Council and Cabinet for a neutral, independent view of matters connected with the committee's duties;

(vii) training sessions organised and feedback reviewed;

(viii) monitoring interest declarations in meetings, registers and allowances claims and recommending changes;

(ix) monitoring practices relating to background papers, exclusion of press and public, deletion of outmoded practices and suggestions for new ones in a preventative role;

(x) review of recent difficult ethical situations and evidence of change to reflect experience gained;

- (xi) review of practices re dispensations and confidentiality;
- (xii) review of practices and initiatives introduced by each chief officer to improve ethical standards;
- (xiii) monitoring practices of stakeholders, external suppliers and service providers relevant to ethical standards in their interaction with the Authority and efforts made to demonstrate to them the Authority's priority attached to high standards of conduct;
- (xiv) evidence that the general body of staff have a reasonable knowledge of what the Monitoring Officer and Standards Committee do, how to ask advice on any matter relating to ethical conduct and what to do if they are aware of unethical conduct in the Council's operations;
- (xv) promotion of the positive aspects of the Committee's work and the Authority's efforts to maintain high ethical standards in the wider community with the object of increasing trust in the Council and its elected representatives

A1.3 The Local Government Chronicle and the Standards Board recently organised for the first time a Good Practice: Standards and Ethics Award. Papers relevant to this are attached. The Committee is RECOMMENDED to consider whether it wishes to pursue any of the options featured in the attached.

Appendix

Appendix 1 Good Practice: The standards and ethics award