
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Chairman: Mike Airey

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to present to Members of Council the Annual Report of the work of its Standards Committee.

Background

2. The Standards Committee has not previously presented an Annual Report to Council. The decision to do so is based on the need for the Standards Committee to ensure that Members of the Council and the wider public can access information about the work of the Committee. The White Paper: Strong and Prosperous Communities indicated that the conduct regime would move from the national Standards Board for England to local Standards Committees. The need for Standards Committees to be seen to be effective and to demonstrate the work that is being done in preparation for the new role was highlighted.
3. As the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act was going through Parliament, consideration was given to whether an Annual Report should be submitted to the Standards Board for England as part of its role in monitoring the work of the local Standards Committees. The decision has however now been made that will be provided through completion of a computerised database. It is however recognised as good practice for the authority itself to monitor the work of the Committee, and that the preparation of an Annual Report is a useful way of demonstrating this. The Annual Report is intended to be a summary of the work of the Committee, and will help to raise its profile with Members.

Outcome of Consultation

4. The draft report was presented to the Standards Committee at its meeting on 28th January 2008 and a revised draft was submitted to the Committee on 10th March 2008 for approval. The report is attached at **Appendix 1** to this report.

Annual Report

5. The report looks at the work of the Standards Committee in 2007 – 2008 and looks at the implementation of the New Code of Conduct in May 2007, the allegations received by the Standards Board for England in relation to Members of the authority, and the preparation for the implementation of the Local Government and Public Involvement in health Act 2007. It is anticipated that with effect from May 2008 all complaints against Members will be made directly to the authority and will be investigated by the Monitoring Officer and heard by the Standards Committee unless the complaint warrants national investigation. The Standards Committee will decide whether the complaint should be investigated at all

and will need to have a review procedure in place to deal with any challenges to a decision. Although the authority has only had four complaints against Members referred to the Standards Board for England in the last year, there will be some increase to the work of the Committee. The recommendation is that the Committee will need to comprise at least three decision making panels, each of which will be chaired by an independent member. Darlington Standards Committee increased its independent membership to three but it is likely that there remain insufficient elected Members on the Committee to establish three separate panels. It is likely that further increases will take place in May to ensure readiness for the new role.

6. The Annual Report refers to the regular Ethical Health Indicators which the Committee receives to monitor a range of issues which can indicate difficulties with the ethical health of the organisation and allow the Committee to conduct further enquiries if the indicators raise concerns. The Committee also has a significant role in Member training and development and, alongside the Audit Committee in the authority's Corporate Governance.

Legal Implications

7. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

8. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

9. This report does not represent a change to the Council's Policy Framework, but the issues contained within this report are required to be considered by Council.

Conclusion

10. The Standards Committee will have an enhanced role under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and it is important that the authority can demonstrate that it is aware of and monitoring the work of the Committee through an Annual Report to Council.

Recommendation

11. Council are requested to note the Annual Report of the Standards Committee.

Reasons

12. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-

- (a) To enable the authority to receive information about the work of the Standards Committee.
- (b) To ensure that the authority can demonstrate that it has a role in monitoring the work of the committee in preparation of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

Catherine H. Whitehead
Borough Solicitor

Background Papers

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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