

*County Council Meeting – 23 June 2009*

**REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

\*+ Mr SFI Rutter  
x Mrs Angela Fraser DL

\* Mr Victor Agarwal  
\*+ Mr Nicolas Davies LVO JP DL  
\*+ Mr Simon Edge  
+ Ms Karen Heenan  
\* Mr Geoff Marlow  
\* Mr Chris Slyfield  
\* Mrs Jean Smith  
\* Mrs Christine Stevens

+ = Independent Representatives  
\* = Present  
x = Present for part of the meeting

**A COMPLAINTS HANDLING PERFORMANCE – YEAR END 2008/09**

1. On 17 April 2009, Standards Committee considered its regular monitoring report on complaints handling performance. The Committee noted the continued improvements being seen in meeting timescales for responding to complaints. However, the Committee was concerned about measuring the quality of responses, particularly in the Highways service. Anecdotal evidence was brought forward to suggest that complainants were not receiving the resolution that they sought and that the time taken to address the reason for complaints was too long. The Committee agreed that the Chairman should write to the Chief Executive, Executive Director for Environment and Infrastructure, and the Executive Member for Transportation to ask how substantive responses by the Highways service to complainants are being improved. It also agreed that Standards Committee would invite the Executive Director for Environment and Infrastructure, the Executive Member for Transportation, and the Head of Highways to the meeting of 3 July 2009 to discuss the ways in which the Highways service can improve their substantive responses to complaints and the apparent discrepancy between the formal complaints recording and member's perception of the number of informal complaints.

**B FAMILIES DIRECTORATE STATUTORY COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08**

1. On 17 April 2009, the Committee received the Families Directorate Statutory Complaints Annual Report 2007/08. The Committee queried whether the service had met requirements by finalising the Annual Report in December 2008.

Officers explained that there were no timescales and CSCI had not questioned the time taken. The main reason for the delay was the absence of senior management in late 2008. For 2008/09, the service will need to ensure that complaints received by the end of March 2009 are closed. Most are but some are at Stage 1 and could continue. The service will aim to complete the bones of the report by May and decide whether to report on some complaints as outstanding. The Customer Relations Service Manager would aim to bring a report to Standards Committee on 3 July 2009.

2. The Committee queried whether links were being made between the JAR Action Plan and the Statutory Complaints Annual Report. It actioned the Customer Relations Service Manager for Children, Schools and Families Directorate to discuss forging links between the Families Directorate Statutory Complaints Annual Report and the Joint Area Review Action Plan with the Strategic Director for Children, Schools and Families.

### **C MAKING EXPERIENCES COUNT**

1. At its meeting of 17 April 2009, the Committee noted the changes to the Statutory Complaints procedure in Adult Social Care. The Committee supported the new approach to handling complaints, which provides an opportunity to review local procedures so the Council can both respond flexibly to complaints, comments and compliments and ensure that the resulting lessons are used to improved services. The Committee requested a review of the changes to the Statutory Complaints procedure in Adult Social Care to be undertaken after six months and reported to the Committee, with the aim of extracting learning to be applied elsewhere.

### **D REPORTS UNDER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT & HOUSING ACT 1989, SECTION 5A – COMPLAINTS BY “MRS BROWNING” AND “MR EDWARDS”**

1. On 17 April 2009, Standards Committee received two reports of the findings of maladministration by the Local Government Ombudsman and endorsed the compensation already paid. It put forward a supplementary report to Council on 28 April 2009.

### **E SUB-COMMITTEE A RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Following an investigation into allegations against five members of a Local Committee, the Investigating Officer made recommendations aimed at avoiding a repetition of the situation that arose in this case. Sub-Committee A of Standards Committee, meeting on 5 March 2009, considered the Investigating Officer's recommendations and made five recommendations to the Standards Committee. On 17 April 2009, Standards Committee agreed the following:
  - a) That all co-opted Members on Surrey County Council Local Committees should undertake training on the processes and policies applicable to the conduct of Local Committees. Training should include a focus on the specific difficulties associated with Traffic Regulation Orders and Rights of Way.

- b) That further training of Members on the Code of Conduct needs to be undertaken as a matter of priority as there is a clear lack of understanding on some of the implications associated with the Code of Conduct, particularly in relation to the Local Committee.
- c) That there needs to be an improved process for assisting members to understand their role, to identify issues well in advance of any meeting, and to ensure that Meetings of the Council are conducted to high standards in accordance with the Local Protocols.
- d) That in the course of the investigation it became apparent that Members may not have a complete understanding of the two categories of personal interest, in particular the registerable interests, as is evidenced by the failure to register membership of the SCC Local Committee. Further training of Members on personal and prejudicial interests needs to be undertaken as a matter of urgency.
- e) That the draft procedure and undertaking form appended to the report be approved, subject to amendments by the Chairman.

**F INDUCTION FOR NEW COUNCILLORS AND RAISING AWARENESS OF THE ETHICAL STANDARDS REGIME**

1. On 17 April 2009, Standards Committee considered proposals to ensure that newly elected Councillors are aware of their responsibilities to register interests and the conduct expected of them. The Committee agreed:
  - a) That Members' induction packs should include the Standard Board's Pocket Guide to the Code of Conduct and a letter from the Chairman of the Standards Committee.
  - b) That the Chairman of the Standards Committee should join the Member/Officers buffet lunch on 8 June.
  - c) That the Chairman should be involved in presenting training on 15 June 2009, and that the Chairman would review the presentation material with officers taking account of the Committee's views.
  - d) That Members be asked how they wish to receive further training, and that the Chairman consider how to take this forward with officers.
  - e) That the Chairman consider with officers how to measure the effectiveness of training.

17 April 2009

Simon Rutter  
*Chairman*