

REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

- *+ Mr SFI Rutter (Chairman for part of item 1)
- x Mrs Angela Fraser DL (Vice-Chairman for part of item 1)

- *+ Mr Nicolas Davies LVO JP DL
- *+ Mr Simon Edge (Chairman for part of item 1-14)
- x+ Ms Karen Heenan (Vice-Chairman for part of item 1-14)
- * Eber Kington
- * Mr Geoff Marlow
- x Mr David Munro
- Mrs Lavinia Sealy
- * Mr Colin Taylor

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

A MEMBERS' CORRESPONDENCE

1. On 3 July 2009, Standards Committee received a report detailing a trend that Initial Assessment Sub-Committee B had identified of complaints referring to alleged failures to respond to correspondence from constituents. The Committee was invited to consider the issue and determine whether it agrees that not responding to correspondence may be a breach of the Code of Conduct and what sort of alleged behaviour with regard to responding to correspondence might lead to a referral to the Monitoring Officer for investigation or other action.
2. The Committee resolved that not responding to correspondence was not always a breach of the Code of Conduct. A referral to the Monitoring Officer would depend on the circumstances of the particular complaint. To assist Members, the Monitoring Officer was directed to draft a policy statement on responding to correspondence. This would include advice on dealing with vexatious complaints and contacts for passing on complaints, comments and compliments about services.

B LOCAL COMMITTEES: CODE OF CONDUCT TRAINING

1. Following an investigation into allegations against five Members of a Local Committee, Standards Committee agreed that training be provided on implications of the Code of Conduct in relation to Local Committees. Legal Services have been providing 12 training sessions in total to ensure that all County Councillors and co-opted Members have an opportunity to attend. On 3 July 2009, Standards Committee was updated on the number of attendees and absentees at each Local Committee.
2. Standards Committee was concerned about the level of absences. The Committee stressed that training had been offered and Members had been

encouraged to attend. If Councillors did not attend training and subsequently made mistakes, they should recognise that they had clearly accepted putting themselves at risk.

C CODE OF CONDUCT: MEMBER KNOWLEDGE

1. On 3 July 2009, Standards Committee received findings from both the Standards of Conduct survey and an Audit and Risk Assurance survey so as to understand the current state of awareness of the need for high ethical standards and of the Code of Conduct within Surrey County Council. The Committee resolved to provide further training in 2011 and to publish a quarterly briefing note. A survey combining questions from the Standards of Conduct survey and the Audit survey would be undertaken in 2010 to measure the effectiveness of training on the Code of Conduct.

D LGC STANDARDS AND ETHICS AWARD: LEARNING POINTS

1. On 3 July 2009, Standards Committee received a report detailing areas of good practice at other local authorities as identified by the Standards Board for England. The Committee was impressed by the good work that had already taken place or was underway within Surrey County Council. It identified a number of actions to improve understanding of the ethical agenda within the Council and amongst the public, including producing an annual report and approaching in-house publications such as Surrey Matters and Grapevine to include articles on Standards Committee.

E COMPLAINTS HANDLING PERFORMANCE

1. On 3 July 2009, Standards Committee considered a report on complaints handling performance during April to May 2009. The Committee requested that an explanation of the below target performance in the Schools and Learning service be circulated to the Committee.

3 July 2009

Simon Edge
Chairman