

County Council Meeting – 15 December 2009

REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

- *+ Mr Simon Edge (Chairman)
- *+ Ms Karen Heenan (Vice-Chairman)

- *+ Mr Nicolas Davies LVO JP DL
- * Eber Kington
- * Mrs Angela Fraser DL
- * Mr Geoff Marlow
- x Mr David Munro
- +* Mr SFI Rutter
- Mrs Lavinia Sealy
- x Mr Colin Taylor

+ = Independent Representatives

* = Present

x = Present for part of the meeting

A STANDARDS CONFERENCE REPORT BACK

1. On 30 November 2009, Standards Committee received feedback on the Standards for England conference from its delegates.

B JOINT STANDARDS COMMITTEE GUIDANCE

1. Standards Committee has noted the Joint Standards Committee Guidance, published by Standards for England. It was felt that there might be some benefits more widely within Surrey from having a Joint Standards Committee and officers were asked to assess the options for a Joint Committee within Surrey or with other neighbouring authorities.

C TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES SUB-COMMITTEES

1. On 2 October 2009, Standards Committee agreed to delegate a number of additional functions to its initial assessment sub-committees: granting dispensations to Members allowing them to speak and vote at a meeting when they have a prejudicial interest; the grant and supervision of exemptions from political restriction; and Determination Hearings into whether a Member has breached the Code of Conduct. The Sub-Committees were to be renamed General Purposes Sub-Committees.
2. On 30 November 2009, Standards Committee agreed a revised terms of reference, which also integrates the Review Sub-Committees. It also decided to rename the Sub-Committees as Standards Sub-Committees.
3. The Council is asked in the report 'Amendments to the Constitution' (agenda item 15) to replace the Terms of Reference of the Assessment and Consideration

Sub-Committees of the Standards Committee at Articles 9.05 and 9.06 of the Constitution with the Terms of Reference of the Standards Sub-Committees.

D GUIDE TO THE INVESTIGATION PROCESS

1. Standards Committee has considered a briefing note that had been prepared that outlines the investigation process. This would be provided to any Member subject to an investigation into an allegation that they have breached the Code of Conduct. It was approved subject to amendments. A Guide to consideration and determination hearings would also be produced.

E RECRUITMENT OF INDEPENDENT REPRESENTATIVES

1. Two Independent Representatives on Standards Committee are approaching the end of their second four-year terms of office. A process has begun to select two replacement Independent Representatives for ratification by Council at its Annual Meeting on 11 May 2010.
2. On 30 November 2009, Standards Committee was apprised of the initial tasks that have been carried out in the process to recruit two new Independent Representatives. It considered a draft advertisement, the information pack for applicants and the potential size and composition of a selection panel.

Recommendation to Council:

That Council delegates responsibility to a selection panel of Standards Committee to shortlist and interview applicants to the position of Independent Representative of Standards Committee.

F GUIDANCE ON MEMBERS' CORRESPONDENCE

1. The most frequent cause of complaints about Members that the Monitoring Officer has received to date is the way that a Member has handled correspondence. Standards Committee had previously looked at the lessons learned from these complaints and asked the Monitoring Officer to provide guidance for Councillors.
2. On 30 November 2009, Standards Committee endorsed draft guidance to Councillors on correspondence and the revision of the Assessment Criteria for complaints to reflect the Committee's view on correspondence, subject to amendments. The Chairman of Standards Committee will circulate the Guidance on Members' Correspondence to all Members of the Council and publish it on the Standards Committee web pages.

G COMPLAINTS HANDLING PERFORMANCE

1. On 30 November 2009, Standards Committee considered a report on complaints handling performance during June to October 2009. It heard about the upcoming changes to the corporate response standard (corporate complaints to be

responded to in 10 working days rather than 18 working days) and the likely increase in the target for responding to stage 1 complaints in time (up from 88% to 90%).

2. Standards Committee has been following up concerns about a mismatch between statistics on the perceived performance of Surrey Highways in response to complaints and anecdotal evidence about that performance. On 30 November 2009, Standards Committee noted a letter from the Chairman of the Committee to the Head of Customer Services.

H ADULTS SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS PROCESS REVIEW

1. Adult Social Care Services were required to put in place the new complaints procedure in line with Department of Health guidance starting 1 April 2009. Authorities were also required to review the process six months down the line. Standards Committee has considered the outcome of the review.

30 November 2009

Simon Edge
Chairman