

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
12 April 2010

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNANCE TASK GROUP
AND PROMOTING THE WORK OF THE STANDARDS
COMMITTEE**

PURPOSE OF REPORT: (1) To review the report and recommendations of the Governance Task Group and to decide what action to take on the promotion of the work of the Standards Committee; and (2) To consider appoint representatives to attend the 2010 Annual Assembly for Standards Committees.

Introduction:

1. The Council at their meeting on 15 December 2009 were asked to consider the report and recommendations of the Governance Task Group. The report to the Council and the minutes are attached as **Appendices A and B** for ease of reference. Chaired by the Chairman of the Council, this was a joint task group of the Audit and Governance and Standards Committees and was constituted in response to the report of the Interim Chief Executive with a remit to consider and make recommendations to the Council on Governance issues.
2. The Chairman has requested that the Standards Committee be given the opportunity to discuss the final report of the Task Group, in particular the recommendations in relation to standards and the work of the Standards Committee.

Main Report

3. The Council made 18 resolutions which are set out in **Appendix A**. The matters falling within the remit of the Standard Committee are set out below for consideration together with a commentary of the present position.

Member/Officer Protocol

(10) That the Standards Committee reviews the Sections of the Member/Officer Protocol relating to Member/officer behaviour and relations (paragraphs 16 and 17), in the light of other authorities' protocols, to ensure that the Protocol adequately addresses expected behaviours, and recommends any changes to Council.

This recommendation is considered as a separate report under **agenda item 7** on this agenda.

Role of the Standards Committee

(16) *That officers be reminded about the role of the Standards Committee and the processes for reporting breaches of the member Code of Conduct.*

Senior officers are included in the distribution list for the standards bulletin, published regularly on behalf of the Standards Committee. To reinforce this, the Monitoring Officer emailed all senior officers in March 2010 to remind them about the Code of Conduct for Members and the Member/Officer Protocol. An article was also included on the Council's intranet site to highlight the importance of the Member/Officer Protocol as well as Members' responsibilities under the Member Code of Conduct. Once the findings of the most recent survey of ethical governance are known, the Committee may wish to consider whether to recommend any additional communication, support or training for officers in this area.

(17) *That the Standards Committee considers how to promote its work more widely and continues to carry out the annual survey of Members and Senior officers, which can help to identify areas of both strengths and weaknesses in Member/officer relationships.*

Annual Survey

At its meeting on 15 February 2010, the Standards Committee agreed to repeat the Standards of Conduct Survey to assess current understanding of the Code and identify any action needed to increase awareness with Members and officers. The Council was later advised that the Audit Commission wanted to undertake a similar survey. To avoid any duplication of work, the Chairman negotiated with the Audit Commission to include questions within its survey to cover all areas of the proposed Standards of Conduct Survey and obtained agreement that the Committee will have access to the results when they are known.

The closing date for responses to the survey was initially 22 March 2010 but this was extended to 29 March to provide more time for Members to complete the survey and ensure the highest possible return rate. The Chairman publicised this later closing date to members when he presented the Standards Committee's report to the Council meeting on 23 March. At a future meeting, the Standards Committee will be given an opportunity to consider the results of the survey, review any issues arising and agree further actions as necessary.

4. Promoting the work of the Standards Committee

As part of their deliberations as to whether to enter the annual LGC Standards and Ethics Awards, the Committee has considered examples of best practice being delivered by other Councils and the recommended practice of Standards for England. Arising from these reports, the Committee has taken a number of steps to promote the work of the Standards Committee. These are attached as **Appendix C**.

The committee now needs to consider how they will further promote the work of the Standards Committee.

Standards for England maintain their website with examples of good practice, some of which may be useful for the Committee to pursue further. Notable practice is broken down into five main headings:

- Engaging Leadership
- Training and skills for Members
- Communicating Standards
- Increasing Confidence in Democracy
- Working with other authorities.

Appendix D identifies initiatives that Standards for England identifies as good practice. The Committee may not feel that all of these are appropriate to the organisation but the following items may warrant further action or investigation:

- The use of printed messages from the Committee on declaration of interest forms, pay advice slip or other media issued by and circulating in the authority.
- Offer interviews to the local press to raise standards issues.
- Webcast a meeting of the Standards Committee.
- Pursue the inclusion of an item in Surrey Matters.
- Hold a staff event to promote standards.
- Make available a complaints leaflet for public information points.
- Set up annual reporting system for Members to assess their conduct and performance.
- invite Independent Members to attend a selection of meetings each year to observe proceedings.
- Issue guidance on using social networking sites and staying within the code.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive. Indeed, members of the Committee may have their own suggestions. Any items agreed would be additional to those already identified on the work programme and tracker.

5. A Place for Standards – 2010 Annual Assembly of Standards Committees, Monday 18 and Tuesday 19 October 2010.

Attendance at conferences offers both the opportunity to obtain information, network with other authorities and share in best practice. Booking forms have now been released for the annual Standards for England Conference at Birmingham. 'A Place for Standards' is focused on sharing good practice, developing high standards and helping authorities to manage a proportionate, cost effective local standards framework. It is aimed at independent representatives and elected members (including those with special responsibility for standards and ethics), monitoring officers and legal and democratic services teams, chief executives and council leaders. This year the wide range of workshops and presentations will include:

- Sessions for new or less experience delegates to build in confidence in managing local assessment, investigations, hearings, determinations and the Code of Conduct.
- How to develop a place for standards and proactively engage with members, leaders and key decision members.
- How to deal with challenging behaviour and get 'difficult' members to understand the local standards framework
- To blog or not to blog? Using social media and staying within the Code.

Last year, the Committee was represented by the Vice-Chairman and Cheryl Hardman, Democratic Services Officer.

The Committee is asked to consider whether they wish to send delegates again this year.

Conclusions:

There is good practice in Surrey but there are opportunities for the Standards Committee to develop further and promote both its own role and the importance of good governance and maintaining ethical standards.

Financial and value for money implications

- 6 Attendance at the conference can be met from existing budgets as part of the Council's commitment to Member learning and development.

Equalities Implications

- 7 The Members' Code of Conduct requires Members not to do anything that may cause the Council to breach any of the equality enactments and the Standards Committee is committed to upholding high ethical standards. Ensuring good governance and promoting the work of the

Standards Committee would further support the Council in its duties under equalities and diversity.

Risk Management Implications

8 None.

Implications for the Council's Priorities or Community Strategy/Local Area Agreement Targets

9 None.

Recommendations:

- 1. That the committee consider the recommendations of the Governance Task Group and consider what further action to take in promoting the work of the Standards Committee.**
- 2. That the committee appoint delegate(s) to attend the 2010 Standards for England Conference.**

Next steps:

To put in place further actions as agreed to promote the work of the Standards Committee.

To book delegate places for the Standards for England Conference as required.

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Sources/background papers:

Minutes of Standards Committee: 15 September 2008, 3 July 2009, October 2009.

Report to Council: 15 December 2009.