

By: Peter Sass - Head of Democratic Services and Local Leadership
To: Standards Committee – 18 March 2010
Subject: The role and remit of the Standards Committee – a discussion paper

Summary: The discussion paper invites the Committee to examine and debate a national report from the University of Hull in relation to the impact of Standards Committees.

Unrestricted

Background

1. At the meeting of the Standards Committee on 20 November 2009, it was agreed that there would be a discussion paper to this meeting, which examined best practice in other Councils in relation to a wider remit for this Committee, with particular regard to the promotion of high ethical standards, the possible introduction of a newsletter; and joint working with District/Borough and Town/Parish Councils.

Assessing the Impact of Standards Committees

2. In October 2009, Professor Alan Lawton and Dr Michael Macaulay from the University of Hull published their research report (**Appendix 1**), which examined examples of notable practice in Standards Committees in relation to the following areas:

- Organisational Learning
- Working with Town and Parish Councils
- Member Development
- Working with Partnerships
- Recruitment and Retention
- Training and Development
- Joint Standards and Audit Committees
- High pressure investigations
- Embedding standards

3. It is suggested that the research report is an excellent basis for a discussion about the role and remit of the Standards Committee.

4. Committee Members will also recall the discussion about its role at the meeting in November 2008 (**Appendix 2**), following a review of 12 Authorities undertaken by Lancashire County Council, when the Committee made the following conclusions:

- (a) *The Committee's existing role and activities in the promotion of high standards of conduct by both elected and co-opted Members is a positive one. The Committee's annual report to the County Council, now in its sixth year, is good practice; the new responsibilities for local investigations have been introduced smoothly; there is excellent cooperation with the Independent Remuneration*

Panel; and there is a constructive working relationship with the 3 Group Leaders in relation to the work of the Committee.

- (b) It is always good to see how other authorities deal with similar issues and the debate prompted by the work carried out by Lancashire County Council was constructive and interesting.*
- (c) Compared to some other authorities, there is a partial crossover at KCC between the work of the Standards Committee and the Governance and Audit and Selection and Member Services Committees. Members agreed that they were not seeking to replicate any of the work of these Committees.*
- (d) Members noted that the quarterly Standards Board Bulletin is sent in hard copy to all Members of the Council, together with a covering letter summarising the key points.*
- (e) In relation to the size and composition of the Committee, Mr Sass was asked to confirm in writing to Members the relative appointment periods for the independent Members of the Committee.*
- (f) The Chairman mentioned her role as a member of the Kent and Medway Independent Standards Committee Member Liaison Group, which she said was a useful forum to discuss areas of common interest.*
- (g) Mr Sass was asked to check the last time that the remuneration for independent Members was agreed and whether it was appropriate to include the matter in the forthcoming review.*
- (h) With regard to training, it was agreed that the independent Members of the Standards Committee should include details of their training in the Committee's annual report.*
- (i) Members agreed that a report should be submitted to each meeting of the Standards Committee, giving the relevant details of the current stage of any complaints that had been investigated by the Assessment Sub Committee, anonymised accordingly.*
- (j) It was suggested that there should be a standing item each year to review the Register of Members' Interests, Gifts and Hospitality, starting in the new Council term.*
- (k) It was also suggested that the Committee should review at least once a year whether personal and prejudicial interests are being properly recorded by Members at meetings.*
- (l) It was agreed that it was good practice to continue to encourage a constructive working relationship with the 3 Group Leaders and that they should all be invited to attend a meeting of the Standards Committee at least once a year, possibly in connection with the Committee's review of registered and/or declared interests or another appropriate matter.*

5. It is suggested that the Committee bears in mind these previously agreed conclusions and principles in deciding on the most appropriate way forward for the role and remit of the Committee, which should be proportionate to the risk of poor or declining ethical standards at Member level within KCC but not complacent. In this regard, Members may consider that there are parallels between KCC and Newcastle City Council, as identified in Case Study 9 in the University of Hull report. The case study states that the Standards Committee at Newcastle has become “an embedded and vital element of the authority” and that it had achieved this success through “a long term commitment and continual engagement of leaders”. Any changes to the role and remit of the Committee, or its Terms of Reference will require the ultimate approval of the County Council and should, ideally, be discussed in advance with the three Group Leaders.

Recommendation:

6. The Committee is invited to consider the documentation circulated and discuss its role and remit and make recommendations accordingly.

Peter Sass – Head of Democratic Services and Local Leadership
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