

By: Chairman of Standards Committee  
To: County Council – 19 June 2008  
Subject: Annual Report of the Standards Committee  
Classification: Unrestricted

FOR INFORMATION

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## **Introduction**

1. This is the sixth Annual Report of the Standards Committee and covers the period June 2007 – June 2008.

## **Changes to the Role of Standards Committees**

2. (1) In preparation for changes, Kent County Council on 21 June 2007 adopted a revised Code of Member Conduct. A new advice note for Members on Registering and Declaring Interests, Gifts and Hospitality under the New Code was also approved.

(2) The new reformed ethical regime brought in by Part 10 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 has, from 8 May 2008, devolved to local Standards Committees the job of determining complaints against County Councillors and co-opted Members of the authority and the Committee has set up a system to comply with these regulations.

(3) A link has been set up on the KCC website giving details of the Standards Committee functions. Following on from the Standards Committee page there are links to:

- The Code of Members Conduct
- the Register of Members Interests
- Members Annual Reports
- the Standards Board for England
- “the Bulletin” (the Standards Board monthly bulletin, which is circulated in hard copy to all Members)
- “How to Complain about a County Councillor”. This gives details of what conduct can be complained about and includes a form to complete either online or in hard copy. It is also planned to promulgate details of the new complaints systems through the publication “Around Kent”.

(4) KCC has been innovative and one of the first Councils in the region to set up this information on their website.

(5) The Committee wishes to thank the three Group Leaders for their support and contribution to setting up the site.

(6) Agreement is being reached with the Fire and Police Authorities and the London Borough of Bromley that in the event of any authority having insufficient independent Members to sit on their Standards Committee hearings,

the other authorities may be called upon to make their independent Members available to deal with specific allegations or complaints. This is considered important given the size of the Committee.

### **Future Programme of Work**

3. (1) The Committee accepts that there are issues around training Councillors in high ethical standards and raising awareness of standards issues and proposes to tackle these matters during the year, perhaps by taking the opportunity of linking in with the Member Development Policy. This will be particularly important for new Members following next years County Council elections

(2) A system has been established for reporting to the Standard Board for England on the monitoring of complaints considered under the new regime; the Head of Democratic Service and Local Leadership will update it on a quarterly basis.

### **Complaints**

4. (1) During the year a total of 3 complaints involving 6 Members were referred to the Standards Board for England: the Board determined that none of the complaints should be referred for investigation.

(2) The procedure for the Chairman of the Committee to facilitate resolution of a possible complaint by one Member against another has, once again, not had to be invoked this year.

(3) The Standards Committee has received its first complaint under the new regime and has appointed an Assessment Sub Committee to consider the initial complaint and, should it prove necessary, a Review Sub Committee has delete been put in place.

### **Members' Annual Reports**

5. (1) The Committee received a report from the Remuneration Panel on Members Annual Reports together with copies of the Reports.

(2) Except for reports from Mr J Fullarton and Mrs B Simpson who had not completed them due to ill health, 82 reports were available for consideration by the Standards Committee on 22 May. However, when the Remuneration Panel met on 12 May, the situation was that only 78 Members had completed their annual report. Apart from Mr J Fullarton and Mrs B Simpson, reports for Mr R Bliss and Mr G Horne had not been signed off by the Leader and were not available. Mr K Ferrin and Mr A Crowther had failed to complete their Annual Returns. Although Mr Ferrin's report was subsequently completed, signed off by the Leader and sent to the Members, together with the reports from Mr Bliss and Mr Horne, Mr Crowther failed to complete his Annual Report in time for the meeting.

(3) The Committee considers this to be unacceptable as the forms were distributed on 11 February and clearly stated to be for completion by 30 April, with the offer of IT assistance should any Member require it.

(4) While the Committee was pleased that the standard of completion was high overall and the majority of Members had taken seriously the responsibility to account for their time on County Council work, a small number of returns were so lacking in any detail that they gave little idea of the activities of the Members concerned, from the perspective of their constituents this will be monitored next year to ensure a consistently high standard from all Members. (These reports, together with Members' Registers of Interest and Party Related Transactions Forms have now been published on the KCC Website).

(5) The Committee was disappointed that some reports did not give specific information on the allocation of the Local Community Grants, and will give specific direction in this regard in the Guidance Notes sent out with the Annual Report forms next year. Some Members expressed concerns about the lack of ongoing training and the Committee hopes that the proposed Member Development Policy will address this issue.

(6) As is normal practice, the Committee will now carry out checks on a sample of forms in order to verify the information they contain.

### **Recommendation**

The County Council is asked to note the contents of this report.

Miss R MacCrone  
Chairman  
Standards Committee

*Background Documents: Nil.*