



Wednesday 13 May 2009



Confidence in local democracy

Annual return

Summary

show all

Section 1	Independent overview		show <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Section 2	Standards committee - annual report		show <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Section 3	Standards committee - promoting standards		show <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Section 4	Standards committee - training		show <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Section 5	Leadership		show <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Section 6	Complaints		show <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Section 7	Member officer - relations		show <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Section 8	Registering member interests		show <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Section 9	Officer conduct		show <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Section 10	Optional questions		show <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Independent overview

Does the standards committee have Terms of Reference?

Yes

What help do members receive on following the Code of Conduct?

Twice yearly training sessions take place. Ad hoc guidance notes are produced, circulated to all Members and placed on the Council's intranet. Each Member is given a flowchart for deciding whether to declare an interest. Specific guidance is proactively offered when there is an issue known to affect a number of Members. Individual advice is offered on request.

Does the standards committee have a forward work plan?

Yes

If yes, who outside of the standards committee is involved in agreeing the forward work plan? Please explain below.

The Monitoring Officer.

Is the standards committee given a role in reviewing amendments to the Authority's Constitution (or Standing Orders where appropriate)?

No

Standards committee meetings.

Please use the table below to indicate how many times between 01/04/2008 and 31/03/2009 the standards committee has met and for what reasons.

Reason for meeting	Number of times met between 01/04/2008 and 31/03/2009
General meeting of whole standards committee	4
Training	1
Assessment sub-committee	3
Review sub-committee	0
Consideration meeting	0
Hearing	1
Other	1



Standards committee - annual report

Does the standards committee produce an annual report on its own work?

Yes

Is the annual report received by a meeting of the full authority?

Yes

Is the annual report sent to all members?

Yes

Is the annual report sent to all senior officers?

Yes

How is the annual report publicised to the general public?

The report is sent to all Parish Clerks and is published on the Council Meeting Agenda and is therefore available to local

public and press.



Standards committee - promoting standards

What else does the standards committee do to communicate the role of the standards committee and the importance of high standards internally within the authority to members and officers?

A Sub Committee meets annually to inspect the registers of members' interests. Members are advised before and after this happens. Committee members attend training for other Members. The Independent Chair attends each Council meeting. The Committee reviews other relevant policies such as the Whistleblowing policy and makes recommendations for improvement.

What else has the standards committee done to promote confidence in local democracy to the wider public?

The Committee has established a mentoring scheme for the Parish Councils for which it is responsible. Under this scheme each of the 22 local Parish Councils gets an annual visit from a member of the Standards Committee. The key purpose of the visit is relationship building and to keep Standards issues in the minds of Parish Councillors. Typically the Committee Member will say a few words about the work of the Committee and they will flag up any particular current issues as regards the Code and the standards regime generally. There are usually some members of the public in attendance at these meetings and Committee Members have been able to discuss the standards regime with them as well.

Has the authority, or the standards committee in particular, considered how it will monitor and ensure high standards of behaviour when the authority is working in partnership with other organisations?

Yes

Please provide examples.

We have Members who sit on both County and District Councils and have established (and used) arrangements for dealing with complaints against these dual hatted Members. Key partnerships such as the Local Strategic Partnership have adopted their own Codes of Conduct.



Standards committee - training

Between 01/04/2008 and 31/03/2009, has the authority assessed the training and development needs of members in relation to their responsibilities on standards of conduct?

Yes

What training needs were identified?

Training for Committee Members on local assessment. General Code of conduct and bias training. Introductory standards training for new Members as part of their induction. Planning training was an issue for a number of Members and, although the need was wider than the ethical issues, that was one element of the identified need.

Please provide a list of training and development opportunities that have been provided to members and officers in the period from 01/04/2008 and 31/03/2009, that are relevant to ensuring high standards. Your list should include any training that relates to the operation of the local standards framework, e.g. local assessment, hearings etc.

New member Induction. Local Assessment training. Ethical standards training (twice). Planning in practice. Standards Board ACSES or the LGG. Code of conduct training opportunities provided internally by all legal and democratic services staff. The Independent Members are members of a Lancashire wide forum which meets quarterly. A variety of training has been offered at these meetings e.g speakers from the Standards Board dealing with publicity issues, updating on progress with the proposed revisions to the Code.



Leadership

How often has the standards committee, or its chair, met the chief executive to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009)?

None

Please also provide an overview of what the meetings were about.

How often has the standards committee, or its chair, met the leader of the council to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009)?

None

Please also provide an overview of what the meetings were about.

How often has the standards committee, or its chair, met the other party group leaders to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009)?

None

Please also provide an overview of what the meetings were about.

Does the standards committee, or its chair, have regular access to the monitoring officer? How regular?

The Chair has access whenever he wants but, on average, the chair and Monitoring Officer will either meet, have a telephone conversation or an e-mail discussion two or three times a month.

How many times in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009) has the standards committee chair been invited to address a full authority meeting?

None

Does the monitoring officer sit on the Corporate Management Team, or equivalent?

Yes

Has an executive member (or senior member where appropriate) been given portfolio responsibility for standards?

Yes



Complaints

Can the public access information, from the authority website, about how to make a complaint against a member?

Yes

What else has the authority done to advertise the complaint process on member conduct to the general public?

The mentoring arrangement for Parish Councils.

Has the authority sought feedback from any of those people involved in an allegation of member misconduct about their satisfaction with the member conduct complaint process (for example the complainant, witnesses or person against whom the allegation was made)? Please choose from responses below.

No, have not sought feedback

How does the authority communicate the outcome of investigations into member conduct to:

a) members

No cases under the new arrangements have been completed during the time period in question. One Parish Council case under the old arrangements was heard and the Parish Council was advised in writing of the outcome.

b) officers

In the case mentioned the Clerk attended the hearing.

c) the general public

The outcome of the case was formally advertised but was also the subject of a press story and the MO was able to give background information as to processes etc.

How does the authority communicate the outcome of allegations into member conduct which have NOT resulted in an investigation (for example those allegations which have not been referred for investigation and those allegations which have resulted in other action) to:

a) members

N/A

b) officers

N/A

c) the general public

N/A



Member officer relations

Does the authority have a protocol for relations between members and officers?

Yes

How is the protocol communicated to officers and members?

The protocol is communicated on induction. In addition it is part of the Council's Constitution and all Members are supplied with a copy.

What is the mechanism for reviewing the effectiveness of this protocol?

The Protocol was reviewed by the Standards Committee this year. A new Parish Protocol has been endorsed by the Committee. The Committee have asked that an amended Borough Council Protocol be presented to their next meeting.

Does the authority include training on the importance of high standards of behaviour in the inductions of new members and officers?

Yes

Does the authority have informal mechanisms for dealing with member/officer and member/member disputes?

Yes

Please provide details of any mechanisms and, if possible, provide an example where this has been used.

The Chief Executive and MO discuss issues from time to time with the individuals involved or through the leadership of the political groups.

Registering member interests

Is the member register of interests accessible to the public on the authority website?

No

Please briefly explain whether there is any particular reason why not.

The Information Commissioner has recently reminded Authorities that public registers still need to be managed in accordance with the Data Protection Act. There is clearly no legal difficulty in complying with the law and having a register available for inspection. Publicising the register on the website though is different. There is room for differing views on what would constitute "fair processing" under the DPA but the safest course of action is to publish only with the consent of Members. The Standards Committee has decided not to do this. They regard the availability of the Registers as being sufficient and have concerns that information could be more easily misused (e.g. for identity theft) if it received wider publicity.

Is the register of gifts and hospitality available to the public on the authority website?

No

What does the authority do to signal to members the importance of declaring interests and completing the register of interests and the register of gifts and hospitality?

In addition to training: each agenda contains a standard item for declarations. The register of interests is reviewed by a Sub Committee annually, any possible issues are raised directly with the Member concerned and all Members are notified that the review is happening. The Committee have recently requested a twice yearly reminder be sent to Members regarding the need to register gifts and hospitality.



Officer conduct

Does the authority have a code of conduct for senior officers?

Yes

Does the authority compile a register of senior officers' interests?

Yes

If yes, is the register of senior officers' interests available to the public on the authority website?

No

Does the authority compile a register of senior officers' gifts and hospitality?

Yes

If yes, is the senior officers' register of gifts and hospitality available to the public on the authority website?

No



Optional questions

The following questions are optional; you do not have to complete them if you do not wish to. However, this information would be useful to us in helping us to raise ethical standards.

On what issues, if any, would you appreciate more support or guidance on from the Standards Board for England?

The Standards Board for England, the Improvement and Development Agency and the Audit Commission have developed a toolkit that authorities can use to assess the ethical governance arrangements in their authority, and also to identify

improvements.

Has your authority used the ethical governance toolkit?

No

If no, has your authority considered using the ethical governance toolkit?

Yes

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