

Report of	Meeting	Date
Corporate Director (Governance)	Standards Committee	10 December 2009

ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To update the Committee on the recent Annual Assembly of Standards Committees attended by the Chair and Democratic and Member Services Officer.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- The report be noted.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Put Chorley at the heart of regional economic development in the Central Lancashire sub-region		Develop local solutions to climate change.	
Improving equality of opportunity and life chances		Develop the Character and feel of Chorley as a good place to live	
Involving people in their communities		Ensure Chorley Borough Council is a performing organization	Y

BACKGROUND

- Standards for England host the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees in Birmingham.

KEY MESSAGES

- The Standards Committee at Chorley has well established practices and procedures and is way ahead many others, with the Parish mentoring scheme and experience of dealing with local assessment and hearings.
- The revised Code is now expected in November / December 2009 for adoption in May 2010.
- The result of the next general election may have implications for the standards regime.
- A new training DVD has been launched on the Local Assessment process and will be viewed prior to the meeting of this Committee.
- The Annual Review 2008 2009 has been published and makes interesting reading.

- 74% of stakeholders agree that the local standards framework is now successfully bedded in.
 - Standards committees take an average of 20 working days to make initial assessment decisions about complaints.
 - 2863 complaints were received.
 - 53% of all complaints dealt with at initial assessment were recorded as 'no further action'
10. In the autumn Standards for England will be undertaking a review of the proportionality of the local assessment process. 50% of local investigations determine that there had been no breach of the Code of Conduct.

OTHER ACTION

11. We worked through several case studies discussing which would be appropriate for other action and noted that mediation works well where people's ongoing relationships are important, those involved want to retain control of the outcome, not dealing with the dispute is unacceptable, people are participating voluntarily and the issues are specific and can be resolved by those involved. It is of note that if the sanction is serious – this is not a case for other action.
12. Mediation works less well or not at all where the people involved are not willing or competent to negotiate, legal or other formal action is being carried out and a higher authority judgement is required and positions on both sides are extreme.
13. We noted that Cambridge have a process for information mediation prior to a formal complaint being made as part of their member/officer protocol. They also publish a quarterly newsletter for Parishes.

STANDARDS AND PARTNERSHIPS

14. A protocol has been developed in partnership with Manchester City Council. The key aim was to develop a shared set of values and behaviours to underpin partnership work. It is intended that this will encourage high standards in partnership working by creating a level playing field for partners by agreeing what good behaviour looks like at the outset. It will enable partners to agree what behaviour they can expect from each other and give them a means by which to hold each other to account.
15. The protocol has been passed to the Assistant Chief Executive (Policy and Performance) who has responsibility for partnerships.

DISCUSSION FORUM

16. Some future development suggestions were made at the discussion forum session, including:
- review the complaint form a year in,
 - Committee to visit schools and community groups/ speak to the Citizens Panel to promote standards,
 - utilize members of the Committee to deliver training to Parish and Borough Councillors,
 - raise awareness with Council staff,
 - offer training to the Police and Fire Authority Standards Committees,
 - train new independent and Parish Council committee members on how the Council works,
 - invite the Chief Executive to attend a meeting of the Committee,
 - for standards to be specifically part of an Executive portfolio.

17. The Chair received clarification from Paul Hoey, Standards for England, that the anomaly of Parish Council clerks receiving notification of the decision of Assessment Sub-Committees, but not district officers, as the notification would be received by the Monitoring Officer – who would already be aware. Also, the Parish Council clerk did not need to take any action with the notification letter.

THE PARISH COUNCIL TOOLKIT

18. A governance toolkit has been developed for use by Parish Councils. The aim is to outline the basics and to sign post to other information.
19. The toolkit has been promoted with the Parish Council clerks already, but it could be worth highlighting it to Borough Councillors who may also be Parish Councillors, perhaps via an “intheknow” article.

PUTTING THE PUBLIC IN THE PICTURE

20. Although this session wasn’t attended by us we heard good reports about it and thought the exercise, appended to this report, might be worth undertaking by the Committee.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

21. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Corporate Directors’ comments are included:

Finance		Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal	Y	No significant implications in this area	

ANDREW DOCHERTY
CORPORATE DIRECTOR (GOVERNANCE) / MONITORING OFFICER

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Ruth Rimmington / Tony Ellwood	5118	15 October 2009	ReportFromAssembly