

**Lancashire Standards Conference  
Monday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007**

**Morning Workshops Feedback**

**Independent Members**

**General Issues**

- Lack of public awareness
- Independent Members can do a lot to promote the background to Standards
- Improve Public Relations/Publicity
- Representation across all ages/ethnic groups/experience

**Would you be prepared to sit on more than one Standards Committee?**

- Demand on time
- Time available from employers – Industry/Commerce
- Fewer people prepared to do voluntary work

**Would you have responded to an advertisement which sought Members for more than one Standards Committee?**

- Depends on why people volunteered, for example whether they volunteered for their own Local Authority or whether it was skills for all
- All down to time
- Need to balance demands
- Only for own Local Authority

**Do Independent Members feel they have sufficient awareness of how local government works?**

- Training is ok at present
- Advertising should include more information about knowledge base

**What difficulties do you see with the new code?**

- Increased demand on time
- Precedents on previous decisions?
- Need to understand previous decisions
- An assessment/investigation would require different people

**Would further training be helpful?**

- Over trained already. A need to actually undertake the role

- Guidance from officers may be helpful
- Role play/Videos would help

### **Questions for Standards Board**

- How long should the complaints process take?
- How do you deal with complaints which carry on without justification?
- Centralisation of Experience?
- Any video/training pack?

### **Elected Members**

**How do you see the role of the Standards Committee Members in guiding other Members of the authority? Should it be formal/informal? Does it work at the moment?**

- Information meetings for all Councillors and Independent Members - informal
- Must invite Parish Councils and there must be training specifically for Parish Councils
- Formal and Informal meetings can work together
- It would be good training for District Councils to invite Parish Council Clerks
- Parish Councils are short of time - at least the Chair and Clerk of a Parish Council should be trained
- Neighbourhood forums/councils require some training too
- If cases are heard by neighbouring Authorities training is vital
- Training should be compulsory
- Code should apply to MPs too, refusals by Parish Councils to sign up to code until MPs do

**What do you think about then new rules on declaring interests? Are there any potential areas of difficulty?**

- Parish Councils see declaring membership of some bodies (National Trust) as petty
- Examples should be given of things which should be declared
- Often bullet points are too simple - need for greater elaboration

What could usefully be done to make sure Members of Authorities are clear about the provisions of the New Code?

- Training must ensure that Councillors know that outside bodies must be declared

- Need for a time limit - 3 months should be ample time for a complaint to be dealt with
- Councillors don't find out about complaints until too late in the process
- What is the difference between supporting residents at planning committees and prejudicial interest?
- Can legal action be taken if confidential information is disclosed at a Planning Committee

**Do members of your Authority complain about different practice between Authorities?**

- Difficult enough to understand your own Authority's practices
- Need to look into practice in across County boundaries
- It is only a problem being on different Authorities if ambiguities arise
- Need for greater and more obvious co-operation between Authorities

**Is there anything in the Code you would like to see altered?**

- Why are discussions between Developers and Councillors permissible?
- Why is a Cabinet Member with an agenda able to speak and vote?

**What Joint Working between Authorities would you like to see?**

- Should be self sufficient
- Must be designed that the public perceive fairness
- Confidentiality is vital if going outside your own Authority
- It is vital that papers do not go astray – scope for more confusion if more than 1 Authority involved

**Officers**

**Members of more than one authority - Protocol required as to dealing with complaints?**

- Need base regulations to help plan in good time
- What Guidance does the Standards Board for England use now?
- How is criminal conduct dealt with under different schemes?

## **Parish Issues**

- How many complaints over the last 3 years – filtered; local and SBE
- Complaints are likely to rise
- Confusion/misunderstanding among complainants
- Major resource implications
- Clear Guidance on criteria is required
- Education of Parish Councils and Clerks
- Training
- Local filtering will give opportunity to work more closely with Parishes

## **Possible areas of joint working for example; Training, Investigations and Recruitment of Independent Members**

- Informal joint working between Blackburn with Darwen and Burnley
- Time and human resources may make it difficult
- Where are the criteria and how do we have to follow them?
- Contracting out investigations to the private sector would be costly
- Insufficient resources for a cross Lancashire protocol
- One person to be employed across Lancashire? – variable workloads
- Capacity of Standards Committees - need to avoid creating a very large regional unit for joint working, small clusters would be preferable
- How to gain public and Members' credibility of investigations and findings
- Difficulties in recruiting Independent Members – possibly a register that other authorities could tap into
- Separate Standards Committees with some joint working for hearings

## **Knotty Issues**

- Guidance p 25 - is there a conflict with the Act?
- Experience of “improperly influence” will be interesting
- If local rules restrict public speaking to certain categories – will Members have to meet these rules in order to speak
- Gifts and hospitality