



Standards

No specific Ward Relevance

Committee

8th December 2009

RAISING AWARENESS OF STANDARDS AND THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE COUNCIL

(Report of the Monitoring Officer)

1. Summary of Proposals

To consider options for and approaches to raising the profile of Standards and the Standards Committee within and outside the Council.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is asked to **RESOLVE** which options and approaches mentioned in this report it would like to pursue.

3. Financial, Legal, Policy, Risk and Sustainability / Environmental Implications

Financial

- 3.1 There may be financial implications arising from this report, depending on which options or approaches the Standards Committee wishes to take. For example, if the Committee is minded to produce an annual report, there would need to be budgetary provision made to cover the cost of printing the report if this was to be circulated in hard copy. Any such costs would be minimised by making use of electronic means, where appropriate.

Legal and Policy

- 3.2 Part III of the Local Government Act 2000 established an ethical framework for the conduct of Members. Sections 51 and 52 of the Act placed a duty on Local Authorities to adopt a Code of Conduct for Members and a duty on Members to undertake to comply with the adopted Code of Conduct respectively. The current Code of Conduct came into effect on 3rd May 2007.

Risk

- 3.3 There is a risk that the role of the Standards Committee within and outside the Council may not be fully understood if the Committee is not proactive enough. There is also a risk that high standards amongst Members may not be promoted sufficiently well and this could lead to complaints being made about Members.

Sustainability / Environmental

- 3.4 There are no sustainability, environmental or climate change implications arising from this report.

Report

4. Background

- 4.1 The Standards Committee Terms of Reference set out the Committee's functions and roles and these include the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct by the Mayor, Councillors, independent and co-opted members (including Feckenham Parish Councillors) as well as functions in respect of the Code of Conduct and investigation of complaints made about breaches of the Code.
- 4.2 In setting its work programme for the year, the Committee decided that it would like to consider approaches it could take to proactively raise the issue of standards within the Council.
- 4.3 The Council's arrangements in respect of the Standards Committee and standards matters generally form part of the Council's governance framework and contribute to demonstrating probity and propriety in the conduct of the Council's business.

5. Key Issues

- 5.1 According to Standards For England (Local standards; national perspectives – Annual Review 2008 – 09):
- a) “Standards of behaviour among members of English local authorities are generally very high. There are relatively low numbers of complaints overall – one for approximately every 25 members on average each year.”
 - b) “Authorities have given good commitment to their duties to establish and operate a local standards framework. They have received enthusiastic support from independent members of standards committees. Standards committees are established and functioning across the country.”
 - c) “While there is considerable Officer and Member confidence in the Code of Conduct and in the local standards framework's ability to uncover and deal with poor standards, the framework has made little impact on the public. We would like to see local authorities use this framework to engage their communities and to raise public trust in local democracy.”

5.2 The Annual Review contains a number of examples of notable practice and case studies which could help to inform the Committee's consideration of options and approaches to raising the profile of standards and the Standards Committee within and outside the Council. These are contained in Appendix 1.

5.3 One of the routes the Standards Committee could take is to publish an Annual report on its work during the year. A copy of the 2007 Annual report of Herefordshire Council's Standards Committee is attached at Appendix 2.

6. Other Implications

Asset Management - There are no identified implications.

Community Safety - There are no identified implications.

Human Resources - There are no identified implications.

Social Exclusion - There are no identified implications.

7. Lessons Learnt

More work needs to be done to raise the profile of standards and the Standards Committee within and outside the Council. There are a number of relatively simple steps, requiring few resources, that could take the Council a long way in promoting standards.

8. Background Papers

Standards For England – Local standards; national perspectives – Annual Review 2008 – 09

Standards in Local Government: Herefordshire's contribution – The Annual report of the Standards Committee for 2007

9. Consultation

There has been no consultation other than with relevant Council Officers in preparing this report.

10. Author of Report

The author of this report is Sue Mullins (Monitoring Officer), who can be contacted on extension 3210 (e-mail: sue.mullins@redditchbc.gov.uk) for more information.

11. Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Extracts of Notable Practice and Case Studies relevant to raising the profile standards and Standards Committees.
- Appendix 2 - The Annual Report of Herefordshire Council's Standards Committee for 2007.