

The Standards Committee Annual Report 2011/12



Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Foreword

This has been a year of some uncertainty while Parliament debated dismantling the Standards regime and revoking the Code of Conduct. The Committee has drawn on its experience to offer assistance to the Council on the way ahead. It has dealt with a small number of complaints. None of these had to go to formal determination.

We now know that the Committee will cease to exist later this year probably at the end of June. Last year I expressed the hope that the past conduct of the Standards Committee and the experience of its members, past and present, would be of value to the Borough Council and the Parishes when they came to consider their response to the changes proposed. A framework has now been put forward to the Council; the Committee has made its contribution to that work. I believe that the Council has found that contribution both relevant and useful.

As always thanks are due to David Bond and his team for the service that supports the Committee, to Group Leaders, the Cabinet Member and the Chief Executive for the helpful discussions we have had through the year and to all the Members of the Committee for their contribution to its work over the past year.



Francis W Hayes
Independent Chair
Standards Committee



Michael Armstrong
Independent Vice-Chair
Standards Committee

1. Introduction

This is the seventh Annual Report of the Standards Committee. The anticipated changes to the standards regime in England have now become law and are scheduled to come into effect in July. This report outlines the future for standards at Stockton and provides an overview of the Committee's work during the past year. The Committee's previous Annual Reports can be accessed at:

<http://sbcinternet/yourcouncil/standprob/standcomm/>

2. The Standards Committee

2.1 Functions

The Standards Committee's functions of promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by the Members and co-opted Members of the authority have been set out in detail in previous Annual Reports and are not therefore repeated here.

2.2 Membership and Structure

The Standards Committee comprises four Members of the Council (with one vacancy), three independent Members and two Parish Council representatives. Francis Hayes, one of the independent Members, continues to be the Chair. The Vice-Chair, Michael Armstrong, is also an independent Member. The membership, including substitute Members, who served on the Committee during the year, is detailed at the Appendix to the report.

3. Conduct of Members – Local Investigation of Misconduct Allegations

3.1 During the year, 8 complaints were received. The Assessment Sub-Committee met on nine occasions and there were three Review Sub-Committee meetings. Referrals for other action occurred in relation to 4 complaints. No action was considered necessary regarding the remaining complaints.

3.2 The relevant reports and minutes can be accessed at:

<http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/kab71.pl?cmte=STD>

The agendas for the Committee's meetings of 23 September, 17 November 2011 and 15 March 2012 refer.

4. The Standards Regime

4.1 The Committee has been instrumental in developing new proposed standards arrangements for Stockton in response to the provisions in the Localism Act.

4.2 Subject to Council approval, these new arrangements will see the Standards Committee ceasing to operate once the Localism Act

provisions come into effect. At the time of writing this report, the Government's intention was for this to be on 1 July 2012.

- 4.3 The proposed new arrangements are considered to be a proportionate response to the Act's provisions, but one which will need to be monitored and reviewed after the new arrangements have been in operation for a reasonable time.
- 4.4 In addition, training and guidance for Members on the duty to register interests, the Council's new code of conduct, disclosable pecuniary interests and the procedures for dealing with misconduct allegations, will be of critical importance.
- 4.5 In the meantime, the Standards Committee will of course continue to fulfil its duties and responsibilities under the Local Government Act 2000.
- 4.6 Details of the proposed new Standards arrangements can be seen in the report to Cabinet on 9 February 2012 which can be accessed at:-

http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/ka_b14.pl?operation=SUBMIT&meet=91&cmte=CAB&grpId=public&arc=71

5. Training and Development

- 5.1 Whilst the local assessment framework has again continued to be an important part of the training for the Standards Committee, the new standards regime has inevitably been much more of a priority in terms of the advice and guidance provided to Members.
- 5.2 A forum for Town/Parish Clerks hosted by the Monitoring Officer was held on 28 October 2011. A further forum took place on 21 February 2012 regarding the Localism Act and new standards provisions. Similar events will be held regarding the Council's new code of conduct and when the regulations about disclosable pecuniary interests are issued.

6. Interests and Gifts and Hospitality

- 6.1 Regular reminders have continued to be provided to Members and Officers about the need to review and update their interests details and to record details of gifts and hospitality.
- 6.2 Members' register of interests details, including gifts and hospitality information are accessible on the Council's website at:

<http://sbcinternet/yourcouncil/standprob/membsintsgifts/>

Monitoring of the registers has taken place regularly throughout the year.

7. Local Government Ombudsman

7.1 The Committee received details of the Ombudsman's Annual Review for Stockton-on-Tees for 2010/11.

7.2 Details can be seen at:-

http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/ka_b12.pl?cmt=STD&meet=64&arc=71

8. Constitutional Framework

During the year, the Committee was again kept up to date with developments regarding the Council's Constitutional framework and arrangements, particularly in light of the local elections and the move to new executive arrangements.

The current version of the Constitution can be accessed on the internet via the link:

<http://sbcinternet/yourcouncil/constitution/>

or at the "Your Council" section of the internet and is also accessible on the intranet.

9. Dispensations

During 2011/12, no dispensations were requested from the Committee under the provisions of the Relevant Authorities (Standards Committee) (Dispensations) Regulations 2002. Under the Localism Act, all Local Authorities, including Parish Councils will now have such powers.

10. Politically Restricted Posts

The Committee was not called upon to consider any matters relating to its responsibilities regarding politically restricted posts. The Localism Act transfers the responsibilities to the Head of Paid Service.

11. Standards Committee Work Programme 2012/13

The Committee will fulfil its statutory responsibilities until 1 July 2012 (or such other date prescribed by Localism Act commencement order) and up to that time will provide whatever support it can to the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct amongst members of the Authority.

12. Conclusion

The Committee has again played a full role in relation to the Authority's ethical governance and will continue to fulfil its duties and responsibilities until the new standards regime is operational.

APPENDIX

Standards Committee Membership 2011/12

Francis W Hayes	Independent Member – Chair
Michael Armstrong	Independent Member – Vice-Chair
Colin V Algie	Parish Representative
Paul Baker	Councillor
Tom Bowman	Parish Representative
Ken Dixon	Councillor
Chris Nestor	Independent Member (Substitute)
Tracey Stott	Councillor
David Wilburn	Councillor

DRAFT

If you would like this information in any other language or format for example large print or audio please contact 'Susan Ranson' on (01642) 527061.

إذا كنت ترغب الحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغات أو بأشكال أخرى على سبيل المثال بالطبعة الكبيرة أو بالشريط المسجل فالرجاء الاتصال 'بدايفرسني تيم' Susan Ranson على هاتف رقم (01642) 527061

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MANDARIN

اگر شما این اطلاعات را به زبان یا شکل دیگری مثلا چاپ بزرگ یا بصورت صدا میخواهید لطفا با تیم دایورسنی (سونانسونی) Susan Ranson یا شمار (01642) 527061 به تماس شوید

FARSI

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KURDISH

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਢੰਗ/ਸ਼ੈਲੀ ਵਿੱਚ, ਵੱਡੀ ਫਾਓਂਟ ਵਿੱਚ ਜਾਂ ਵੋਧ/ਸੀ ਡੀ 'ਤੇ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ Susan Ranson ਨੂੰ (01642) 527061 ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

PUNJABI

اگر آپ ان معلومات کو کسی بھی اور زبان یا انداز، مثلاً بڑے پرنٹ/آڈیو ٹیپ وغیرہ میں حاصل کرنا چاہیں تو ڈاکو رشی ٹیم Susan Ranson کو اس نمبر پر فون کیجئے (01642) 527061

URDU