

Report to: Standards Committee

Date: 18th November 2008

Subject: The Standards Board Conference 2008

Report of: Service Director Borough Solicitor

Contact officer: K P Lawson (Telephone: 01942) 827026

Purpose / summary: To advise Members of the views discussed at the Standards Board Conference

Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended: N/A

Recommendation / decision: Members are requested to note the report

Key Decision: This report does not involve a key decision.

Risks / Implications:

Financial:	None
Staffing:	None
Policy:	The Members' Code of Conduct is part of the Council's Constitution
Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted?	N/A
Wards affected:	All

Property Implications– Does the proposal involve a reduction, addition or change to the Council's asset base or its occupation?

No

Does this proposal have significant implications for the Council and the local population?

No

Does this proposal involve a new policy or procedure or significant changes to an existing policy or procedure?

No

Has the Service Director Borough Solicitor confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution? **Yes**

Has the Service Director Corporate Services confirmed that any **Yes**

expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget?

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? **No**

For Cabinet reports only :

Categorisation of the report:	x		x
Discussion leading to a decision		Discussion	
Monitoring		Decision	
Sharing for corporate understanding		Information	

Tracking/Process:

Standards Committee	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
18.11.08			
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council

There are no Background Papers to this Report within the meaning of Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Proper Officer K P Lawson

Date 14.11.08

Background:

- 1.1 The Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committee was held in Birmingham on 13th and 14th October this year under the overall title of “Delivering the Goods”. The title very much reflected the nature of the conference which considered the implementation of the Local Assessment of Complaints by Standards Committees. The conference was attended by the Monitoring Officer and Chair of the Standards Committee and this short report seeks to inform Members of the issues that were discussed.
- 1.2 In addition to the main speeches and presentations to all members, there were a substantial number of smaller workshops including those on local assessments, investigations and the outcome of Standards Committee findings in cases.
- 2.1 The opening address was given by the new Chair of the Standards Board, Dr. Robert Chiltern. He commented upon his attendance at the various Party conferences and in particular comments made at the Conservative Party conference concerning the future of the Standards Board. He commented upon the successful implementation of the Local Assessment of Complaints by Standards Committees and noted that the number of cases that have been considered are down by almost a third on the same period last year.
- 2.2 The topics that he would want considered over the next year include
 - the establishment of best practice guidelines,
 - working towards consistency in the manner in which Standards Committees operate in relation to local assessment,
 - further guidance on sanctions imposed by Standards Committees,
 - working on standards in local partnerships,
 - an enhanced training role for the Standards Board
 - a consideration of the wider role of Standards Committees in local authorities.
3. The role of Standards Committees was reported on positively by Sadiq Khan M.P. the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State who stressed the importance of Standards Committees in building confidence in the democratic system and enhancing the reputation of government and local government. He commented on the change in the role of the Standards Board for England to that of a strategic regulator which monitors the processes, performance and practices of local authority Standards Committees allowing it to provide further training and guidance. He also commented upon the current consultation exercise revising the Members’ Code of Conduct.
- 4.1 Another of the key presentations to the conference related to the wider role that Standards Committees can play in local authorities and the areas suggested as possible included
 - Training – both Members and officers
 - Whistleblowing – review of policy and specific issues as they arise
 - Member/Office Protocol – guidance and ensuring compliance
 - Internal and External
 - Reports on Ombudsman cases
 - Monitoring and Guidance and Review of the Constitution
 - Action on Anti Fraud Policies

- Employment/Disciplinary Matters
- 4.2 Clearly, at Wigan the Standards Committee does not deal with a number of the above which are considered either by the Audit and Governance Committee or indeed by Regulation Committees. The fact that in many authorities Standards Committees do not cover the whole range of issues mentioned was recognised but it was suggested that the Standards Committee should have regular meetings with such committees as the Audit and Governance Committee and indeed Cabinet. It was also recommended that the Committee should report, at least annually, on its work to the Executive and Council.
5. A further topic discussed was the manner in which the Standards Committee should carry out its role and what makes a standards committee effective. It was suggested that the Standards Committee should
- Be proactive in embedding ethical standards in the authority
 - Take a leadership role in standards
 - Be seen as a friend and not a foe to Members
 - If standards were properly embedded then the Standards Committee should be recognised and appreciated
 - It should be able to demonstrate and prove a change in behaviour and attitudes
 - It should build relationships with key parties including Group Leaders, Cabinet Members, the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Executive
 - It should be known for the role it plays and it should have its own web site and release information both through the web site and other channels and complaints forms should be accessible through its web site
 - It should communicate both to Members, officers and the public on ethical standards issues
6. In conclusion, the conference was helpful in allowing representatives of local authority Standards Committees to exchange concerns and issues and press the Standards Board for more detailed guidance and training in various areas. I can confirm that Wigan is no longer the most complained about local authority and is now actually regarded in quite a positive light. The problems that we encounter are indeed similar to those of other authorities.