

Report to: Standards Committee

Date: 24th March 2009

Subject: Enhancing the Role of a Standard Committee

Report of: Service Director Borough Solicitor

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

Purpose / summary: To seek Members views on possible steps to enhance the role of the Standards Committee within the Council

Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended: Members can resolve to take no action on the proposals or may add other actions to take the role of the Standards Committee forward

Recommendation / decision: Members are recommended to endorse the proposals detailed in 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 expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? **Yes**

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

Tracking/Process:

Standards Committee	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
24.03.2009			
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council

Proper Officer K P Lawson

Date 9th March 2009

1. Background:

1.1. At its recent meetings Members of the Standards Committee have considered the fundamental role of the Committee, the extent to which the Committee actually fulfils its objectives and whether the Committee should pursue a wider role in the Council.

1.2. Members are aware that the Standards Board for England had reported at the annual conference that it was itself considering giving further advice to Standards Committees on the wider role of those Committees in Authorities. As yet no further advice has been received from the Board. The potential roles referred to included:-

- Over-seeing training for both Members and Officers.
- Whistle-blowing - a review of the policy and issues as they arise.
- The Member/Officer protocol – giving guidance and ensuring compliance.
- Internal and external action to promote standards.
- Receiving reports on Ombudsman cases.
- Monitoring and guidance and the review of the constitution.
- Action on anti fraud policies.
- Employment/disciplinary matters.

1.3. Members took the view that whilst the role of the Committee could be enhanced it need not move into areas which were already adequately covered within the Council. Currently whistle blowing policies, policies in relation to action on fraud and report on ombudsman cases were within the ambit of the Audit and Governance Committee. The Committee also expressed the view that it would not wish to widen its role into employment and disciplinary matters in relation to employees.

1.4. Members also considered a note from the annual conference on what makes a Standard Committee effective. It had been suggested that a Standards Committee should:-

- Be proactive in embedding ethical standards in the Authority.
- Take a leadership role in standards.
- Be seen as a friend to Members.
- Be recognised and appreciated in relation to the promotion of standards.
- The Committee should be able to demonstrate a change in behaviour and attitudes.
- The Committee should build relationships with key parties including Group Leaders, Cabinet Members, the Monitoring Officers and the Chief Executive.
- It should be known for the role it plays and should have its own website and release information both through the website and other channels and a complaints from should be available through its website.

- It should communicate both to Members, officers and the public on ethical standards issues.

Members did appreciate that these were accurate indicators of whether the Committee was indeed being effective in its role. In further examining the Committee's role Members have also considered the relevant elements of the Use of Resources Assessment carried by the Audit Commission. The relevant sections are attached as an appendix to this Report.

2. Proposals

2.1 Based on discussions at the Standards Committee it is suggested that the following steps can be pursued to strengthen the role of the Committee in promoting standards and indeed promoting a sound ethical framework within the Council.

Training

2.2 It is suggested that the Standards Committee can take a more involved role in overseeing training for both Members and Officers in standards and ethics issues. The Committee can consider what training is available currently and what training is thought to be required together such areas as:-

- Clarity in the roles of Officers and Members.
- The Officer/Member Protocol.
- The ethical framework within the local authority.
- The Members Code of Conduct.
- Promoting standards with partners.
- Specific issues arising from recent cases.

In particular the Committee can consider feedback from those training sessions, the take up of training and the impact of that training.

Promoting Standards.

2.3 1 In advancing the role of the Standards Committee it is thought sensible for the Committee through its Chair to report annually to the Council on its activities and issues which it seeks to progress or bring to the Council's attention.

2.3.2 It is further considered appropriate in further establishing the Standard Committee as part of the framework of the Authority that it meets regularly with the Audit and Governance Committee and indeed representative of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to view holistically the performance of the Authority.

2.3.3 Further meetings with the Group Leaders and indeed the Chief Executive would be beneficial in promoting a dialogue and a positive working relationship with key parties within the Council.

The Website

2.4 The website of the Standards Committee, a copy of the entries of which are attached as a further Appendix, can be utilised to widen the contacts of the Committee. The website could include key issues currently under consideration, the annual report and the more general dissemination of information.

Conclusion

2.5 These steps can be seen as initial moves to progress beyond the basic function of ensuring compliance with the Members Code of Conduct. As further guidance from the Standards Board for England arises then the Committee can further consider widening or strengthening its role.

Members views are requested.