

STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND CONFERENCE 2009

Minister of State

Main Points

- Public trust in Council Members is the cornerstone of local councils.
- Devolvement of decision making has now been completed.
- The Standards regime has been the subject of 3 debates in Parliament.
- Purpose of local SC's:
 - Not to serve any political party, solely the democratic process;
 - The promotion, education and support of members;
 - The promotion of ethical well being within Councils;
 - To establish positive relationships with the public;
 - To establish and maintain political impartiality.
- Councillors are elected to **serve** the community. Misconduct by one member damages the reputation of all members and the council concerned.

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Chairman of Standards For England

Main Points

- Chair of Local SC defined by Statute.
- Great public anger concerning the behaviour of politicians.
- Conservative Party has stated that standards control will be returned to local communities should they be returned to power – Green Paper 9.
- SFE have published pamphlet outlining the present structure and explaining reason why it should remain. Suggest SC's write to local Members of Parliament.
- Parliament would benefit from a similar and rigorous standards structure to that existing in local democracy.
- Details of recent national surveys
 - Do politicians tell the truth?
 - Local politicians – Yes 28%; No 20%
 - Parliamentarians - Yes 24%; No 29%
 - Support for the code
 - Standards Committees – 98%; Monitoring Officers – 97%; Elected Members – 90%; Town & Parish Councillors – 92%;
+?
 - Authority returns:-
 - 81% agree the maintenance of high standards is one of the most important issues;
 - 47% believe that standards have improved in their Authority;
 - 42% agree that the Standards Committee has a high profile within their authority
 - An excellent SC –
 - Ensures compliance with the code
 - Has quality membership
 - Demonstrates Innovation
 - Wields influence
 - Demonstrates excellent communication
- Presently nothing exists in the system to address vexatious or persistent complainers. Under consideration.

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Chief Executive of Standards For England

Main Points

- Conclusions of Annual Review –
 - Established England Framework
 - 438 SC's consisting of 4507 Elected Members and 1658 Independent members.
 - High Standards exist. Of 26363 recorded complaints only 80 elected members found to have broken code (1 in 25) resulting in 25 being suspended or disqualified (1 in 3000).
 - Source of complaints. Public – 54%; Members 36%; Officers 4%; Parish/Town Clerk 3%; Other 3%.
 - Outcomes. NFA 53%.
 - Confidence in system. 75% members and officers; 25% public.
 - Best practise will be published on website within next few weeks,
 - Revised Code will be published in May 2010.
 - Public are very interested in Standards in Public Life and pleased with the work of SC's, conversely concerned with the triviality of some complaints, the length and cost of investigations, punishment should fit the crime but that often no real punishment is passed on offenders.
 - By Xmas Standards for England will have reviewed a number of processes including – Cost; complication; penalties for breaches of conduct; political effect; and complaints.

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Engaging Leaders and Embedding Standards **Essentials Components of Successful SC's**

Main Points

- Supportive and clear remit from Leaders and Chief Executives.
- Independence of SC guaranteed from the leaders of all parties.
- Very good and competent independent SC members.
- Attendance of influential and respected Councillors and party whips (no cabinet members)
- Support of Officers from all services.
- No control of any type by officers of elected members.
- SC knowing when to "point the finger".
- Sell SC to every other Committee, particularly Governance & Scrutiny Committee. Establish working/contact processes. Seek views on Code and punishments.
- Photo & Publicity for SC members – introduce to each committee.
- Examine and comment upon every council protocol.
- Bi Monthly newsletter for Members & Parish Councils.
- Establish Newsletter fro all households.
- Establish parish Council Liaison Officer.

SEE HANDOUT AND COPY FROM WEB IF POSSIBLE

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Joint Working Main Plenary Protocols and Practice

Main Points

- Few Authorities have joint working and none have joint Standards Committees.
- Benefits.
 - Avoidance of conflicts of interests – SC Members and MO's.
 - Consistency of procedures and decision making.
 - Enhanced public confidence (greater distance from member).
 - Greater capacity.
 - Effective use of resources.
 - Increased ability to promote high ethical standards.
 - Ability to fund process.
 - Stronger support functions.
- Problems
 - Overly Bureaucratic and complex process.
 - Member resistance.
 - Differing resource implications
 - Absence of local ownership.
- Historical cooperation – MO meetings & SALC participation.
- MO/SALC meetings
 - Law changes
 - Share experiences
 - SALC input
- SC Member involvement
 - Annual get together
 - MO presentations
 - External speakers & joint training
 - Local assessment.

- How it worked in practice:
 - Manageable numbers of complaints.
 - Exchange of reviews.
 - Investigations
 - Advice
 - Borrowing members
 - Ensure arrangements are in your constitution.
- The future:
 - Local Government Review
 - Continue with present arrangements
 - Considering joint committees
- Experience:
 - Joint working processes and arrangements
 - Relationships of members and different committees
 - Wining the confidence of local public.
- Joint member allowances?

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Sharing Good Practice

Main Points

York City Council

- SC Members Personal development needs review e.g.;
 - Are resources available to support this?
 - Who will provide mentoring?
 - Websites are available for volunteer training – NCVA
 - Interaction with media.
- Annual Council & Parish Councils Conference – Agenda compiled by officers and clerks
- Circulate Standards Information
 - Form of complaints
 - Number of investigations
 - Register of interests
 - Traffic Light review system
 - Identification of mentors throughout organisation.

Rossendale Borough Council

- In 1992 was designated the worse council in England. Designated best SC in 2009.
- Initially experienced low staff morale and interest. Inadequate or no officer training.
- In 2002 an independent chair was appointed to lead the SC.
- In 2003 new, competent and enthusiastic officers appointed.
- SC placed between elected members and officers and the Leader & CE were supported in their insistence that everyone work as one team regardless of party politics

- SC elected members **agreed with the prime rule** – forget about politics. All SC issues unanimously **supported throughout the Council**.
- Agreed SC rules:
 - A busy, tightly controlled schedule of work.
 - All members of SC attend meetings properly prepared.
 - Work to Audit Commission set targets
 - Nobody talks to the media other than the relevant council officer.

Leeds City Council

- Combined training for Parish & Town councillors
 - Initial meeting with County Association of Parish Councils, including information as to what's going on and who is/is not attending training.
 - SC arranged training for Parish Councillors. Initially only 15% of Parish Councils attended workshops and of those only 35% councillors attended.
 - When SC solely organise these workshops they are always poorly attended by PC's or ignore what they are taught and carry on regardless, treating SC with contempt as there is no perceived punishment/restrictions.
 - PC's are often very experienced and practical and should be treated as equal partners. Organised workshops/training must include heavy involvement of PC's in presentations. **(Mike Wilkinson Chair of SC willing to offer advice if contacted)**.
 - Agreed pressure is now put upon local PC's regarding recruitment of Parish Councillors. Requirements include professional attitude and stable hardworking personalities. Present recruitment rules interfere with past experience.
 - Standards for England are not assisting the development of standards concerning Parish Councillors.
 - Develop a SC Road Show and take to PC's.
 - Ask PC's to attend planning training sessions.
 - Demonstrate to PC's that SC is there to help and support them and not just sitting in judgement.

London Borough of Hackney SC

- SC responsible for supervising whistleblowing, complaints and standards processes
- Always have a copy of Local standards Framework Manual available at meetings.
- **No information regarding complaints/investigations is published until a hearing and result.**
- Regular health checks regarding governance at the conclusion of each quarterly meeting. Remit of SC to comment on all governance policies including gift and whistleblowing registers.
- SC members spend a day with Leader and main opposition leader. Also attendance at various committee meetings/area meetings reporting back to SC.

Hull City Council – Losing the Plot

- One bad apple, the Leader, with subsequent rapid transgression to a rotten barrel. Leader sentenced to a term of imprisonment.
- Tainted Culture.
- KPMG Public Interest Report 2002 and Ethical Governance Audit 2002 dealt with following issues:
 - Inadequate leadership at Council, political, management and community levels
 - Wider impact and issues
 - Culture
 - Reputation
 - Relationship between staff and public
 - Majority of services underperformance
- **Eventual success was built upon:**
 - Commitment from the top
 - Bravery and risk taking
 - Transparency
 - Relationship building and community engagement.
 - A published standards and values framework
 - “People” issues championed
 - Structural changes which broke down silo attitudes and practices
 - Clear accountabilities including performance.
 - Establishment of a cross party group concerned with ethics

SEE SLIDES RE CONTEXT, LEADERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS