



Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance)

Council

Date: 15th July 2009

Subject: Standards Committee Annual Report and Standards for England Annual Return 2008/09

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to make the Council aware of the Standards Committee Annual Report and the Standards for England annual return for 2008/09. This report provides an outline of the content of the annual report, and information about the new requirement for the Standards Committee to complete an annual return to Standards for England.
2. The Standards Committee has been obliged to complete an annual return for Standards for England (previously known as the Standards Board for England) which was submitted in June 2009. The annual return is part of a statutory requirement to provide information to Standards for England which is stipulated in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
3. Once this information is submitted Standards for England have suggested that it is shared with the Full Council, and published on the Council's website. A copy of the annual return is therefore attached as Appendix 2 to this report. In future, this information will be incorporated within the Standards Committee Annual Report to prevent any duplication.
4. Members of the Council are asked to note the Standards Committee Annual Report 2008/09 at Appendix 1, and the Standards for England annual return attached as Appendix 2.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to make the Council aware of the Standards Committee Annual Report and the Standards for England annual return for 2008/09. This report provides an outline of the content of the annual report, and information about the new requirement for the Standards Committee to complete an annual return to Standards for England.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 It has been proposed that an annual report be submitted to the Council to outline the achievements of the previous year and plans for the year 2009/10. The appearance of this report reflects the Standards Committee's concern to enhance awareness of its role and activities. The final draft of the report was approved by the Standards Committee at its meeting on 21st April 2009. At this meeting, it was also agreed that the annual report would be presented to the Council at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.2 The annual return is part of a statutory requirement to provide information to Standards for England which is stipulated in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Collecting information on how local authorities are supporting ethical conduct is part of Standards for England's role in ensuring the effectiveness of local standards arrangements.
- 2.3 This year's annual return was submitted to Standards for England in June 2009. Before the final version was submitted to Standards for England it was shared with the Monitoring Officer and the Chair of the Standards Committee for comments and amendments. A copy of the final version is attached as Appendix 2 to this report for Members' information.
- 2.4 Once this information is submitted Standards for England have suggested that it is shared with the Standards Committee and the Full Council, and published on the Council's website.

3.0 Main Issues

Standards Committee Annual Report 2008/09

- 3.1 This section of the report summarises the contents of the Standards Committee Annual Report.

The Work of the Committee 2007 - 2008

- 3.2 The section regarding the work of the Committee is categorised in the same way as last year's annual report, into issue areas which reflect the Committee's terms of reference. However a section on the local assessment process has been added to incorporate this additional area of responsibility for the Standards Committee.
- 3.3 Promoting, monitoring and reviewing the codes of conduct
- Members Code of Conduct 2009
 - Reviewing the Codes and Protocols
 - Ethical Audit 2007
 - Monitoring compliance with the Code of Conduct

- Considering final investigation reports
- Register of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality
- Officer Code of Conduct

3.4 Local assessment of complaints

- Creation of the Assessment and Review Sub-Committees
- Adopting the local assessment procedures
- Review of local assessment procedures
- Raising awareness of the local assessment process
- Training and guidance for members of the sub-committees

3.5 Providing guidance and training

- Induction for City Councillors
- Governance Matters

3.6 Relationship with Parish and Town Councils

- Addressing the results of the Annual Audit
- Parish and Town Council conference
- Training for Parish and Town Councillors

3.7 Working with other agencies

- Consultation and Research
- Local Government Chronicle Awards 2009
- The Centre for Local & Regional Government Research
- Standards Board for England
- Association of Independent Members of Standards Committees in England (AIMSce)

Issues for 2009 - 2010

3.8 The potential work of the Committee for the next municipal year is summarised at the end of the report.

These issues are outlined below:

- Implementation of the Ethical Audit action plan
- Raising the profile of the Standards Committee
- Implementation of the new Member and Officer Codes of Conduct
- Retirement of the current Chair

Standards for England Annual Return 2008/09

3.9 The purpose of the annual return is to find out what arrangements each authority has in place to ensure and promote high ethical standards. The return asks questions about the way the authority supports ethical standards as a whole, not just how it handles complaints. The annual return is also an opportunity for each authority to inform Standards for England of their particular achievements and successes in supporting and promoting the ethical framework.

3.10 The Monitoring Officer is required to submit quarterly returns to Standards for England about the complaints which have been received and how they have been dealt with. The annual return complements the quarterly return, by asking about the

ethical environment in the Council and requesting information which will allow Standards for England to understand the culture and wider governance arrangements within the Council.

3.11 The questions in the annual return will change each year in line with the development of the framework. The Council was required to provide information about the following topics to complete this year's return:

- The role of the standards committee
- The annual report of the standards committee
- What the standards committee does to promote standards
- Training
- Leadership
- Complaints
- Member / officer relations
- Registering interests
- Officer conduct

3.12 Standards for England have stated that the information collected in the annual returns will be used to drive up performance, champion the work of standards committees, and to ensure that they have an effective overview of local standards frameworks. In particular Standards for England will:

- Collect notable practice examples of standards committee activities which they will then disseminate.
- Identify national gaps in local standards frameworks. A national overview of the local operation of the standards framework would enable Standards for England to identify strengths and weaknesses of local standards frameworks and mitigate some risks in their operation by prompting where they should be producing guidance or seeking policy changes in response to any emerging national trends.
- Identify local gaps in local standards frameworks. This would enable Standards for England to identify those authorities who could be experiencing difficulties and may require support and advice.
- Build profiles of individual authorities which can be used as background information when Standards for England are engaging with an authority.
- Share information with the Audit Commission to enable them to complete their organisational assessments. The Audit Commission will use the annual return information to form the basis of their assessment of local authorities under the Use of Resources Key Line of Enquiry in the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

4.1 There are no implications for Council policy.

4.2 By producing a report which details its work throughout the year, and the principal decisions it has taken, the Standards Committee is promoting transparency in its actions. The annual report is also a method by which Members and officers can be informed of the Standards Committee's role and its inputs and outputs. This is an objective of the corporate governance communication plan which seeks to cascade regular information to Members and officers. The annual report will therefore have a fundamental contribution to the corporate governance arrangements of the Council.

4.3 The information in the annual return contributes to the Use of Resources element of the Comprehensive Area Assessment, as the information is shared with the Audit Commission and will form the basis of the Audit Commission's assessment of each authority.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

5.1 There are no legal or resource implications.

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 The publication of this annual report will support the Council's governance arrangements by promoting transparency in the Standards Committee's actions.

6.2 The annual return is part of a statutory requirement to provide information to Standards for England which is stipulated in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Collecting information on how local authorities are supporting ethical conduct is part of Standards for England's role in ensuring the effectiveness of local standards arrangements.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 Members of the Council are asked to note the Standards Committee Annual Report 2008/09 at Appendix 1, and the Standards for England annual return attached as Appendix 2.