



Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance)

Standards Committee

Date: 16th December 2009

Subject: Eighth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees: 'Bringing Standards into Focus'

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 advise Members of the Committee of the Eighth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees which took place on 12th & 13th October 2009 at the International Convention Centre (ICC) in Birmingham.
2. This year, the Annual Assembly's emphasis was on listening to delegates' experiences, responding to their concerns and sharing ideas and innovations in relation to the local standards framework.
3. Members of the Committee are asked to note the contents of this report and the attached newsletter.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

1.1 To advise Members of the Committee of the Eighth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees which took place on 12th & 13th October 2009 at the International Convention Centre (ICC) in Birmingham.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 The theme of this year's conference was 'Bringing Standards into Focus'. One edition of 'The Standard' newsletter has been published since the conference took place, and is attached at Appendix 1 for information.

2.2 The Assembly was attended by the Chair and Councillor Mrs Walker on behalf of the Committee and by Nicolé Jackson, Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance) and Monitoring Officer. Both the Chair of the Committee and the Monitoring Officer co-presented a workshop.

3.0 Main Issues

3.1 Three main plenary sessions were held:

- State of the Nation – Dr Robert Chilton and Glenys Stacey, Chair and Chief Executive of Standards for England respectively, provided the latest standards statistics and trends, highlighted the successes of local assessment and explained some of the challenges that authorities have dealt with;
- The Big Debate: the Local Standards Framework – force for good or necessary evil? – Kirsty Cole, Strategic Director and Monitoring Officer at Newark and Sherwood District Council spoke about her experiences as a Monitoring Officer since the inception of the standards framework. She believes that the standards framework is necessary, however she does not believe that it is proportionate for a number of reasons (for example, the Monitoring Officer cannot deal with complaints which are obviously trivial or politically motivated, and parts of the Code of Conduct are too complex and difficult to interpret). She also believes that, for the standards framework to have an impact, the authority must first have embedded a strong ethical culture and values; and
- On the brink: coming back from ethical collapse – during this session, Professor Alan Lawton from the University of Hull discussed the possible causes and impacts of ethical collapse, and how to recover from it. Kym Ryley, former Chief Executive of Hull City Council and Pete Moore, Executive Director of Lincolnshire County Council also spoke about their own experiences, and how their Councils recovered from ethical collapse.

3.2 Several workshop sessions and discussion forums were also held throughout the conference, including 'Other action: examples and results', 'Local assessment, sharing lessons learnt' and 'Focus on Code changes'. The Chair of the Standards Committee co-presented a workshop with Professor Alan Lawton from Hull University Business School and Anne Rehill from Standards for England looking at the features of highly effective standards committees. The Monitoring Officer co-presented a workshop with two officers from Standards for England on 'Managing Investigations with Confidence', which allowed delegates to share their experiences to develop a checklist for effective investigations management.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

- 4.1 The Annual Assembly provides an opportunity for Members of standards committees to discuss their experiences and exchange examples of good practice. The Assembly also provides training on a range of standards issues.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal or resource implications.

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 This year, the Annual Assembly's emphasis was on listening to delegates' experiences, responding to their concerns and sharing ideas and innovations in relation to the local standards framework.
- 6.2 The Chair of the Committee is invited to feedback to the Committee on the Annual Assembly.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 Members of the Committee are asked to note the contents of this report and the attached newsletters.

Background Documents

All background documents used are available from the Annual Assembly website (<http://www.annualassembly.co.uk>).