

Standards Board for England – Annual Return Questions & Responses

Independent Overview

Does the Standards Committee have Terms of Reference?													
Yes													
Overall Responses: Yes: 99% (418) No: 1% (4)													
What help do Members receive on following the Code of Conduct?													
<p>Members receive training and guidance materials on the Code of Conduct, and are able to contact officers for additional advice and guidance when necessary. Members receive compulsory training on the Code of Conduct on their election and re-election through the Members' Induction period. They are also provided with a copy of the guidance booklet from the Standards Board for England, our own e-learning package on the Code of Conduct and a pocket guide to the local codes and protocols for reference purposes. Members on Planning and Licensing Committees also take part in compulsory governance training every year which includes a section on the Code of Conduct. Members are sent the Standards Board for England Bulletin and our own newsletter called 'Governance Matters' which covers the work of the Council's governance committees and has a regular 'spotlight on' section which focuses on a specific conduct or governance subject in each issue. Members are assisted with complying with the requirements for them to register and declare interests through the methods identified in the answer to question 8.3.</p>													
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SfE Publications (e.g. the Bulletin, our guidance, DVDs)	16 (68)												
Regular reminders to declare interests	9 (38)												
Does the Standards Committee have a forward work plan?													
Yes													
Overall Responses: Yes: 51% (215) No: 49% (207)													

If yes, who outside of the Standards Committee is involved in agreeing the forward work plan? Please explain below.

In consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee, the Monitoring Officer and other senior officers who support the Standards Committee will suggest adding items as necessary. This might be as a result of national or local developments. However overall the Standards Committee approve the work programme at the end of each Committee meeting. They are also able to comment on the work programme or request that items are added at any point.

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
Monitoring officer	56 (236)
Other officer (e.g. Senior solicitor, Head of Legal, Head of Civic Services,)	34 (143)
No one	17 (72)
Chief Executive	12 (51)
Full council	10 (42)

Is the Standards Committee given a role in reviewing amendments to the authority's Constitution (or standing orders where appropriate)?

Yes

Overall Responses:

Yes: 50% (211)

No: 50% (211)

If yes, when was the last review undertaken and what was the standards committee's role in the review? Please explain below.

The Standards Committee has responsibility for reviewing the local codes and protocols (which supplement the Member and Officer Codes of Conduct) and does so annually. The Standards Committee also reviews its own Procedure Rules on an annual basis and after conducting hearings.

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
It reviewed some proposals (only those related to its work)	29 (122)
It made recommendations to full council about proposals	25 (106)
It reviewed items on its own composition, procedures and Terms of Reference	17 (72)
It reviewed various codes and protocols	13 (55)
It reviewed the Members' Code of Conduct	12 (51)

Standards Committee - Annual Report

Does the Standards Committee produce an annual report on its own work?													
Yes													
Overall Responses:													
Yes: 59% (249) No: 41% (173)													
If yes, is the annual report received by a meeting of the full authority?													
Yes													
Overall Responses:													
Yes: 50% (211) No: 50% (211)													
If yes, is the annual report sent to all Members?													
Yes													
Overall Responses:													
Yes: 53% (224) No: 47% (198)													
If yes, is the annual report sent to all senior officers?													
No													
Overall Responses:													
Yes: 45% (190) No: 55% (232)													
If yes, how is the annual report publicised to the general public?													
The Annual Report is published on the Council's website and is highlighted in the Council's newsletter on governance and standards issues, called 'Governance Matters' – also available on the Council's website.													
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Council website	79 (333)												
AGM or full council agenda	32 (135)												
Standards committee agenda	12 (51)												
Press release / local newspaper	11 (46)												
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Standards Committee - Promoting Standards

What else does the Standards Committee do to communicate its role and the importance of high standards internally within the authority to Members and officers?

The Standards Committee features heavily in the Council's own newsletter on governance and standards issues, called 'Governance Matters'. Governance Matters is sent to all Directors and Chief Officers, all staff within Legal and Democratic Services, and all Councillors and co-opted Members of the authority.

The Standards Committee maintains close links with the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee (CGA), and the Chair of the Standards Committee is a co-opted (non-voting) member of CGA. The Standards Committee also provide CGA with six monthly progress reports on their work and each receives the others' minutes.

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
Arrangement of and involvement in training / induction	33 (139)
Standards committee presence at other council meetings	29 (122)
Promotion via council website	20 (84)
Production of or contribution to newsletter / bulletin / poster	19 (80)
Circulation of minutes, meeting reports. Inclusion on agendas	15 (63)

What else has the Standards Committee done to promote confidence in local democracy to the wider public?

The Standards Committee produces an annual report which is published on the Council's website. The Standards Committee has also taken part in the LGC Awards this year to try to raise the profile of standards and ethics within the Council. This has led to publicity through the Standards Board for England and the LGC due to being short-listed for the standards and ethics award.

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
Promotion via council website	40 (169)
Inclusion in council publications	21 (89)
Attending external meetings / opening meetings out to public	15 (63)
Promotion via the local press / media	10 (42)
Circulation of minutes, meeting reports, inclusion on agendas	8 (34)

Has the authority, or the Standards Committee in particular, considered how it will monitor and ensure high standards of behaviour when the authority is working in partnership with other organisations?

Yes

Overall Responses:

Yes: 48% (203)

No: 52% (219)

If yes, please provide examples.

The authority has a Governance Framework for Significant Partnerships and has developed a Partnerships Toolkit to support this. A register of the Council's significant partnerships has also been compiled in conjunction with Directors.

The governance framework places requirements on the Council's significant partnerships in terms of their ethical behaviour, and the Standards Committee has had an overview of these requirements.

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
Protocol for joint working, partnership framework, memorandum of understanding or similar document	32 (135)
Involved in reviews, audits or risk assessments	17 (72)
Issued guidance and advice	13 (55)
Discussed at standards committee meetings or other council meetings	12 (51)
Developed, delivered or attended training	10 (42)

Standards Committee – Training

Between 1st April 2008 and 31st March 2009, has the authority assessed the training and development needs of Members in relation to their responsibilities on standards of conduct?

Yes

Overall Responses:

Yes: 75% (317)

No: 25% (105)

If yes, what training and development needs were identified?

- General training on the Code of Conduct (provided through the induction and when necessary);
- Training on legislation such as Human Rights, Data Protection, Freedom of Information and Equalities (provided through specific guides); and
- Training for Members of Planning and Licensing Panels on relevant governance issues (provided through an annual compulsory training session).

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
Local framework	41 (173)
Code of Conduct	37 (156)
Inductions for new members	9 (38)
Ethical governance/behaviour	8 (34)
Chairmanship skills	3 (13)

Please provide a list of training and development opportunities that have been provided to Members and officers in the period above that are relevant to ensuring high standards.

Your list should include any training that relates to the operation of the local standards framework e.g. local assessment and hearings.

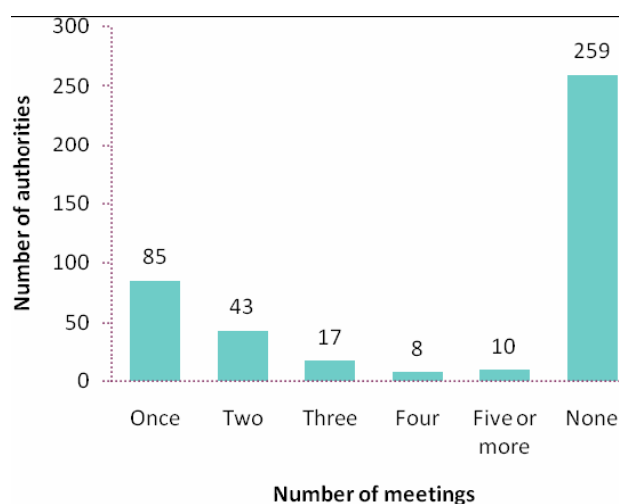
- Training on the Members' Code of Conduct through Induction (May 2008)
- Briefing Notes issued to all political groups regarding local assessment process
- Compulsory 'Governance and Conduct' training for all Members of Planning and Licensing Committees – update on the Code of Conduct and training on local assessment process
- Training session through the Parish and Town Council Annual Conference on the Members' Code of Conduct and the local assessment process
- Series of lunchtime seminars for officers working within Legal and Democratic Services on registration and declaration of interests for Members, the general obligations of the Members' Code of Conduct and the local assessment process
- Training for officers through the Corporate Induction on the Member and officer Code of Conduct
- Training for officers through an ethical governance package – available on request and identification of a particular training need through the PDP process.

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
Local framework/assessment	66 (279)
Code of Conduct	58 (245)
Determinations (hearings)	17 (72)
Ethical standards generally	17 (72)
Chairing skills	6 (25)

Leadership

How often has the Standards Committee, or its Chair, met the Chief Executive to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months (from 1st April 2008 to 31st March 2009)?

Two



Please also provide an overview of what the meetings were about.

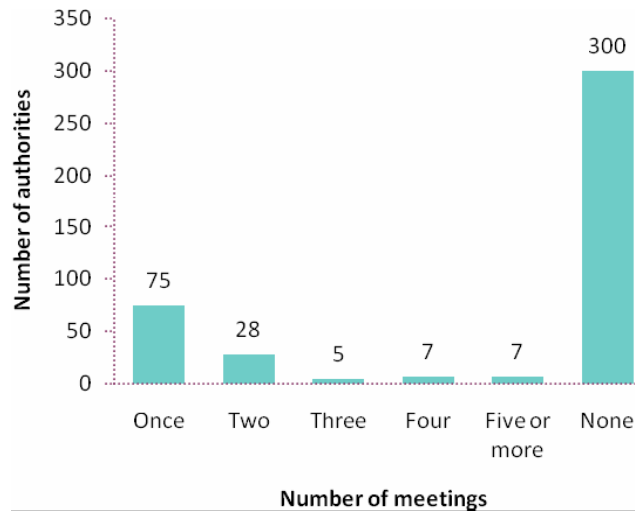
- Options for increasing the membership of the Standards Committee
- Briefing on the New Local Assessment Arrangements
- Member co-operation with Case Investigations
- Opportunities to review the scope and remit of the Standards Committee Terms of Reference
- Relationships with and between Members

These meetings are scheduled on a quarterly basis.

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
General ethical issues and assessment of standards in authority	18 (76)
Role and responsibilities of the standards committee	15 (63)
Local framework and assessment of complaints	11 (46)
Discussion or review of documents or reports e.g. Terms of Reference or Annual Report	9 (38)
Lessons learnt, action planning, future work or meeting agendas	9 (38)

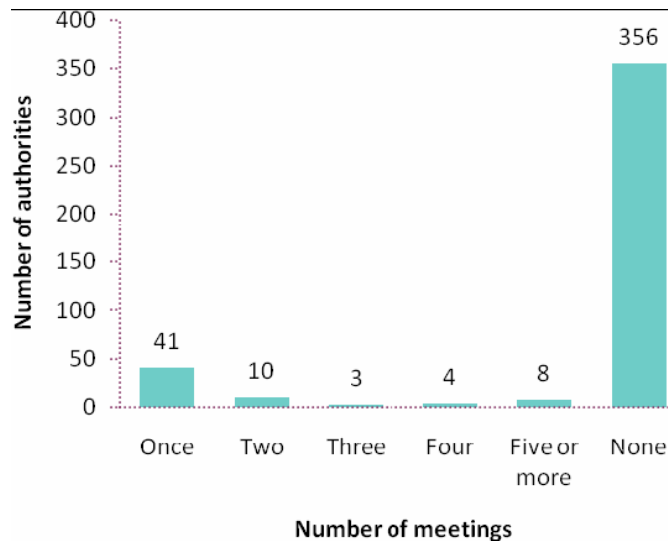
How often has the Standards Committee, or its Chair, met the leader of the Council to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months?

Four



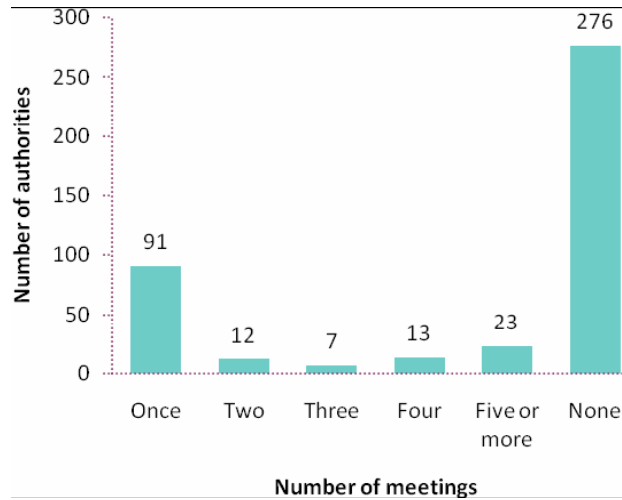
How often has the Standards Committee, or its Chair, met the other party group leaders to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months?

None



How many times in the last year has the Standards Committee Chair been invited to address a full authority meeting?

None



Does the Monitoring Officer sit on the Corporate Management Team, or equivalent?

Yes

Overall Responses:

Yes: 60% (253)

No: 40% (169)

Has an Executive Member (or senior Member where appropriate) been given portfolio responsibility for standards?

Yes

Overall Responses:

Yes: 31% (131)

No: 69% (291)

Complaints

Can the public access information, from the authority website, about how to make a complaint against a Member?

Yes

Overall Responses:

Yes: 94% (397)

No: 6% (25)

What else has the authority done to advertise the complaint process on Member conduct to the general public?

A notice was placed in the major local newspaper, and in all Council buildings with details of telephone numbers and where to access the complaints form.

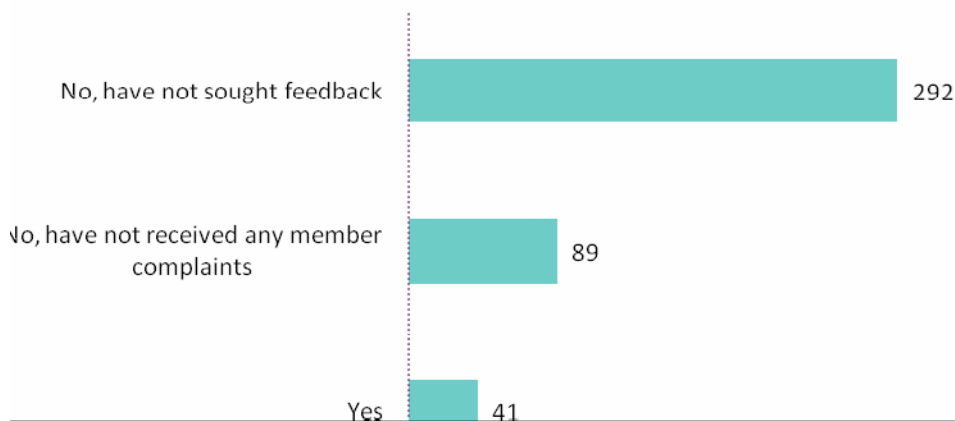
A letter was also sent to all Citizen’s Advice Bureaux in the Leeds area asking them to put up a notice and explaining the process to them should they be asked to assist a member of the public with such a complaint.

Customer Services Officers have also been provided with details of the new process so that if any complaints are referred to them involving Councillors they can advise and redirect the member of the public accordingly.

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
Information in local press	43 (181)
Information in council publications (e.g. news letter to all households)	34 (143)
Information displayed in public buildings/reception areas	24 (101)
Complaints leaflet	17 (72)
Advertising through parish councils	10 (42)

Has the authority sought feedback from any of those people involved in an allegation of Member misconduct about their satisfaction with the Member conduct complaints process?

Yes



How does the authority communicate the outcome of investigations into Member conduct to:

- a) Members
- b) Officers

c) The general public

We have never communicated our findings (except when the Standards Committee conducted a full hearing in May 2006) as all investigation reports and meetings considering those reports have been classified as exempt by the Committee.

We have not yet had any investigations completed under the new system. However when this happens, the outcome would be communicated through the minutes of the Assessment Sub-Committee who receive the final investigation report and decide whether to refer the matter to a Standards Committee Hearing (the minutes of the Sub-Committees are anonymised but published on the Council's website and received by Full Council and the full Standards Committee). If there was a finding of no failure the subject Member would have the choice of whether the Committee should publish a summary of their findings in the local press. If the matter went to a hearing and the Member was found to have breached the Code, a notice of the outcome would be placed in the local newspaper.

a) Members

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
Report to standards committee	20 (84)
Standards committee agendas and/or minutes available to members	18 (76)
Regular report to full council by standards committee chair or monitoring officer	15 (63)
Letter and/or copy of report	12 (51)
Council web site	12 (51)

b) Officers

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
Report, minutes or other Standards committee materials, e.g. agendas	18 (76)
Website	9 (38)
Management team are informed	8 (34)
Related/relevant officers are informed	8 (34)
Written (email/letter)	6 (25)

c) The general public

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
Minutes	20 (84)
In accordance with Regulations	13 (55)
Annual/periodic report	8 (34)
Decision notice	5 (21)
Statutory notice	3 (13)

In allegations of Member conduct which have NOT resulted in investigation, such as those allegations which have not been referred for investigation and those which have resulted in other action, how does the authority communicate the outcome to:

- a) Members
- b) Officers
- c) The general public

The outcome would be communicated through the minutes of the Assessment / Review Sub-Committee (which are anonymised but published on the Council's website and received by Full Council and the full Standards Committee), and through the publicly available case summaries. These are available for inspection in the Council's offices.

a) Members

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
Communicated to the standards committee	24 (101)
Communicated to complainant and subject member	22 (93)
In writing	15 (63)
Included in minutes or agendas	14 (59)
Regular reports (e.g. annual, quarterly)	13 (55)

b) Officers

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
Through minutes of meetings	55 (232)
Not communicated to officers at all	51 (215)
Communicated to senior officers	47 (198)
Only communicated if the officer was the person making the complaint	35 (148)
Through authority website	35 (148)

c) The general public

Top 5 Responses	% of responses
Meeting documents (agendas, minutes or reports)	20 (84)
Not communicated to the public	16 (68)
Through authority website	16 (68)
Only communicated if the member of the public was the person making the complaint	12 (51)
In accordance with Regulations ²	10 (42)

Member Officer Relations

Does the authority have a protocol for relations between Members and officers?													
Yes													
Overall Responses: Yes: 93% (392) No: 7% (30)													
If yes, how is the protocol communicated to officers and Members?													
<p>The protocol appears in the Constitution. Training on the Code of Conduct for Members makes reference to the protocol, especially with regard to bullying and treating officers with respect. This includes face to face training, e-learning and the pocket guides to the local codes and protocols.</p> <p>Training on the Members' Code of Conduct for officers within Democratic Services makes reference to the Protocol, in light of their large amount of contact with Members. The Corporate Induction for all new staff also makes appropriate mention to the local codes and protocols. For staff who require more in depth training, there is also a training package on ethical governance available on request (through the appraisal process).</p>													
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Handbook	8 (34)												
Reported to full council	7 (30)												
Does the authority include training on the importance of high standards of behaviour in the inductions of new Members and officers?													
Yes													
Overall Responses: Yes: 96% (405) No: 4% (17)													
Does the authority have informal mechanisms for dealing with Member/officer and Member/Member disputes?													
Yes													
Overall Responses: Yes: 84% (354) No: 16% (68)													

Registering Member interests

Is the Member Register of Interests accessible to the public on the authority website?
Yes
Overall Responses: Yes: 34% (143) No: 66% (279)
Is the Register of Gifts and Hospitality available to the public on the authority website?
Yes
Overall Responses: Yes: 21% (89) No: 79% (333)

Officer conduct

Does the authority have a Code of Conduct for senior officers?
Yes
Overall Responses: Yes: 77% (325) No: 23% (97)
Does the authority compile a register of senior officers' interests?
Yes
Overall Responses: Yes: 67% (283) No: 33% (139)
Is the register of senior officers' interests available to the public on the authority website?
No
Yes: 3% (13) No: 97% (409)