

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

9 March 2011

REVIEW OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE PLAN 2010 - 2014

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Committee on developments in respect of the priorities in the Standards Committee's Plan since the last review in September 2010.

Background

2. In May 2010 the Committee approved a plan for its work which included its top priorities for 2010 and other areas for action. The Committee agreed to review the plan twice a year in September and March.
3. Since the plan was agreed the Government has proposed significant changes to the standards regime in the Localism Bill, published in December. The plan has been reviewed in the light of these changes.

Main Considerations for the Council

4. A copy of the plan with comments updating members of the Committee on the agreed priorities is attached as Appendix 1.
5. Key points to note are taken from the chairman's overview and are set out below for convenience.
6. Following the publication of the Localism Bill in December 2010 the Standards Committee received a report in January on its implications for the standards regime. The Committee has asked the Constitution Focus Group to consider the proposals in the Bill and to report back with its views on these and the adoption of voluntary standards arrangements for Wiltshire Council. This work will continue to be developed as the Bill proceeds through Parliament towards Royal Assent, which is anticipated in Autumn of this year.
7. The Localism Bill contains transitional measures to facilitate the move from the current regime to the new voluntary arrangements. Whilst details are yet to be provided in regulations it seems clear that the Committee will continue to be responsible for dealing with complaints under the Code of Conduct well into 2012. The actual end date will depend on how many cases remain to be determined after the appointed day, which we anticipate will be fixed between January and April 2012. In the meantime it will remain the Committee's priority to ensure that its statutory responsibilities are discharged efficiently and effectively.

8. Town and Parish Councils have been advised that support and training will continue to be available pending any change in the legislation. This includes advice and support on the changes proposed for these councils in the Localism Bill.
9. The Committee recognises the importance of dealing with complaints in a timely and efficient way. To this end the Committee is actively monitoring progress of cases against the agreed targets. Local assessment sub-committees continue to gain experience in assessing complaints as a consequence of which less complaints are being referred for investigation. The proportion of cases referred for investigation this year is now significantly below the national average. Following the review of process by the Committee in September 2010, steps have been taken as agreed to streamline cases within the requirements of the statutory framework. In particular, retention of the same members for the Consideration and Hearing Sub-Committees has been a positive improvement.
10. The review of the Constitution was completed successfully in November 2010 when the Council agreed the changes recommended by the Standards Committee. These came into effect on 1 December 2010. The Constitution Focus Group, which has been a very effective forum for the review work, is being retained to consider any changes that become necessary as a result of new legislation, including the Localism Bill.
11. The Standards Committee has confirmed its commitment to supporting the Council in the development of its culture change programme. The Council's culture plan is summarised on pages 40-42 of its Business Plan 2011-2015, which was adopted by the Council on 22 February 2011. The relevant extract is attached at Appendix 2.
12. We will be meeting with the Leader and the Chief Executive to discuss how the Standards Committee can support the Council in promoting the new culture.
13. The plan will be reviewed in September 2011, by which time the Localism Bill should be nearing completion of its passage through Parliament.

Environmental Impact

14. None.

Equalities Impact

15. The plan is consistent with the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy.

Financial Implications

16. None arising directly from this report.

Legal Implications

17. Implementation of the plan enables the Committee to discharge its statutory responsibilities more effectively.

Proposal

18. The Committee is asked to note the developments in respect of the priorities in the Plan since the last review in September 2010.

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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report: None