

Wiltshire Council

Standards Committee

21 September 2011

Review of the Standards Committee Plan 2010-2014

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Standards Committee in respect of the priorities in the Standard's Committee's plan since the last review in March 2011.

Background

2. In May 2010 the committee approved a plan for its work. The Committee agreed to review the plan twice a year in September and March.

Main considerations for the Committee

3. A copy of the plan with comments updating members of the committee on the agreed priorities is attached at Appendix 1.
4. Key points to note are taken from the chairman's overview and are set out below for convenience.
5. The Localism Bill has not yet completed its passage through parliament. At the time of writing this report it had completed its third reading in the House of Lords and was scheduled to reach report stage in the Lords on the 5 September 2011. It had been anticipated that the Bill's passage through Parliament would have been nearly completed by the time this report was written, but that has not proven to be the case. However, there are no indications at this stage that the appointed day will be delayed significantly beyond late spring of 2012.
6. The Parliamentary web-site's most recent summary of the clauses of the Bill relating to the Standards regime is as appears below:

“abolishing the Standards Board regime and the model code of conduct, and introducing local accountability and a criminal offence of deliberate failure to declare a personal interest in a matter”.

7. The Constitution Focus Group has recommended that Wiltshire Council adopt a voluntary Code of Conduct for its members. Any such voluntary Code would have to be adopted by full Council and would then form part of the Council's constitution. It would be binding on members of the Council.
8. Officers have drafted a voluntary Code of Conduct and a procedure for receiving and investigating complaints for consideration by the Standards Committee and then by full Council.
9. Consideration will also have to be given to what sanctions may be available in a non-statutory local conduct regime.
10. In the meantime the Standards Committee has continued and will continue to focus on discharging its statutory responsibilities efficiently and effectively. To that end it is worth noting that the timescales for investigations and determinations in relation to new investigations has been adhered to.
11. Officers have developed a training package for town and parish councils, but take-up has been poor. This may be because of the forthcoming changes in the statutory Code.
12. The chairman and the Monitoring Officer have met with the Leader and the Chief Executive to discuss how the Standards Committee can support the council in supporting the council's culture change programme.
13. The Governance Team in collaboration with Mr McCallum of the Standards Committee has completed its review of the Standards Committee pages on Wiltshire Council's web-site, and improvements have been made to the content.
14. The Governance Team has also set up systems for identifying where town and parish council registers of interests are incomplete, and ensuring that declarations are completed and held on file. They have also set up systems with colleagues in the Elections Service to be notified when a new member takes up office. As a result they are better able to ensure that new members' declarations of interests are submitted in a timely manner.

Proposal

15. The Standards Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

Training and Communications Issues Arising

16. There are no general training or communications issues arising from the proposals made in this report that would require the formation of a task and finish group of the Standards Committee.

Risks

17. There are no risks associated with the proposals made in this report.

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