



Standards Committee

Annual Report 2010/11

1. Introduction

1.1 The full Standards Committee held two ordinary meetings in 2010/11 (i.e. the year to 31 March 2011) - on 15 June and 25 October 2010.

1.2 At the Council's Annual Meeting on 26 May 2010, Sophia Lambert, C.B. was formally re-appointed as Chairman of the Committee for the following year and Jennifer Ware as Vice-Chairman. The full Committee membership for the Municipal Year 2010/11 has been:

- Miss Sophia Lambert, C.B. (independent Chairman)
- Mrs Jennifer Wade (independent Vice-Chairman)
- Dr. Ike Anya (independent member)
- Cllr. J. M. Blakeman
- Cllr. Timothy Coleridge
- Cllr. Mary Weale

2. Business at Standards Committee meetings

2.1 At its 15 June 2010 meeting the Committee considered, *inter alia*, the following matters:

- (i) the Annual Governance Statement
- (ii) the Council's plans for the induction of new Councillors following the May 2010 Borough Elections.

2.2 At its 25 October 2010 meeting the Committee considered, *inter alia*, the following matters:

- (i) The future of the Standards regime
- (ii) Policy on Councillors' use of IT (*which was subsequently incorporated into the Members' Code of Conduct by the Council at its meeting on 8th December*)

- (iii) The governance of partnerships
- (iv) The Government's consultation on the Code on Local Authority Publicity
- (v) Interests and bias in relation to Standards Committee business

3. Code of Conduct Complaints

- 3.1 Three complaints were made to the Standards Committee in 2010/11 as against five the previous year. Each complaint was considered by the Initial Assessment Sub-Committee of the Standards Committee, at meetings on 28 June, 7 July and 7 September 2010. Two of the complaints concerned matters which the Sub-Committee concluded could not be considered breaches of the Code of Conduct, although in one case the Sub-Committee felt that the Member had acted unwisely. In the other case, following the resignation of the Member concerned, the complaint was withdrawn by the complainant in advance of the Sub-Committee considering the matter.
- 3.2 One of the complainants requested a review of the Sub-Committee's decision to take no action on the complaint. The complaint was considered again by a Review Sub-Committee with a different composition, but it came to the same decision as the Initial Assessment Sub-Committee.
- 3.3 A fourth complaint has recently been received and is soon to be considered by the Initial Assessment Sub-Committee.

4. Other issues

- 4.1 The 'virtual network' of London Standards Committee chairmen established by our Standards Committee Chairman in 2008 has continued to prove useful as a means of liaising on common problems.
- 4.2 The Chairman wrote to all the newly elected Members after the May elections to advise them of the importance of complying with the Members' Code of Conduct.

5. Chairman's Conclusion

- 5.1 The Standards Committee is scheduled to meet on 14 June and 25 October 2011.
- 5.2 The Government proposes, as part of the Localism Bill, to abolish both the Code of Conduct and the current regime of Standards Committees. So it seems likely that the present committee will

disappear sometime next year. Until its abolition, the Committee will continue to take what steps it can to ensure that the present ethical framework is adhered to and high standards maintained.

- 5.3 Under the Bill as currently drafted, it will in future be open to individual authorities to devise a voluntary Code of Conduct of their own and to establish a committee to deal with breaches of their local code. Any such committee would not, however, have any powers to sanction Members except by way of censure and possibly by the withdrawal of allowances.
- 5.4 The other main innovation in the Bill is a clause making failure to register or declare interests without reasonable excuse a criminal offence. Normally, criminal offences would be dealt with by the Police, but as presently drafted the Bill seems to establish a dual jurisdiction involving both the Police and the individual Councils, as it envisages regulations giving Councils powers to take sanctions of their own in cases of failure to follow the rules on declaring interests. This part of the Bill is muddled and is likely to be amended as it goes through Parliament - but it could be that Councils will in any case have to establish some sort of committee to deal with these cases.
- 5.5 I will not personally mourn the passing of the current regime, as I have always considered the Code far too detailed and the Standards Committee regime clumsy and over-prescriptive. I do regret, however, that the Bill also repeals the General Principles of Conduct in Local Government, based on the Nolan Principles of Public Life, that currently apply to all councillors. These principles (selflessness, honesty and integrity, objectivity etc.) currently form the preamble to our Code. It is not that I fear the Kensington and Chelsea councillors are likely to cease observing their current high standards once the principles are repealed. What worries me, rather, is the perception of the public if the Nolan principles are no longer seen as a requirement in local government. Even if the Royal Borough does not decide to draw up its own local code, I hope that these principles can somehow continue to be enshrined in the Constitution.
- 5.6 My thanks go to members of the Standards Committee for their diligent work during the year.

Sophia Lambert, C.B.
Chairman of the Standards Committee

Background papers used in the preparation of this report: None other than previously published documents.

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