

**Report to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
from the Standards Committee**

Committee Membership

There has been no change in the membership of the committee in the last twelve months.

Committee meetings and business conducted

Attached to this report is an appendix that summarises the items that have come before the committee in the last year.

Many of these were reviews of and comments on proposals for procedures and regulations, but the following are worth some further comment:

In January 2005, Mr. Peter Flamank of Price Waterhouse Coopers briefed the committee on the annual external audit. The particular interest of the committee lay in any matters of governance that might require some further examination. The committee were pleased to note that, based upon objective criteria, the Council had performed well under all headings examined subject to there being scope for improvement on the presentation of financial statements. There may be some need for review of the procedures for exercising standards of financial conduct and the detection of fraud.

In June, the internal auditor gave a full presentation of her role. After the committee had asked questions, there did not appear to be any matter of an ethical consideration that gave cause for concern.

These presentations were in line with the committee's policy of examining areas of the Council's activities in which issues relating to the Code of Conduct might arise, or which might reveal the need for additional training.

Encouragement of training in the Code of Conduct is an important part of the committee's terms of reference. At the September meeting the Director of Law and Administration reported on the training carried out and guidance notes issued on the Code to date. Some concern was expressed at the low turnout at a training session held for Planning Services Committee members.

The Register of Interests has also been tabled at a meeting for inspection.

During the year, the Standards Board launched a consultation on a review

of the Code of Conduct. This was considered at the June meeting and a response agreed and despatched. The committee's response was separate from and not identical to that submitted on behalf of the Council.

This review process continued for the rest of the year and was supplemented by the publication, in December 2005, of a consultation paper from the ODPM on "Standards of Conduct in English Local Government: The Future." This document draws not only on the recommendations of the Standards Board on the Code of Conduct but also of the Graham Committee on Standards in Public Life and of the ODPM's Select Committee. The latter body considered the effectiveness and role of the Standards Board. The former considered the roles of both local standards committees and of the Board. Comments on the paper from the Royal Borough's standards committee will be made following their January 2006 meeting.

Conferences

The Chairman and the Vice-Chairman each attended a day of the Standards Board Conference in Birmingham in September. The event was mainly given over to the various reviews that have now resulted in the paper produced by the ODPM. The Director of Law and Administration presented one session on the subject of Alternative Action very skillfully.

Chairman's Comments

The gist of the proposals now being put forward is that (a) the Code of Conduct will be modified to simplify it and to enable members with a declarable interest to speak at a meeting before withdrawing and (b) to change the relationship between the Standards Board and local committees.

The process of devolving responsibilities to those committees and to their monitoring officers will continue. Eventually, the committees will hear all but the most serious complaints (although these have to be defined). It is hoped that the local structure will also provide a filtering process for complaints and a conciliation procedure, which should forestall formal complaints being laid.

The Board would become a strategic authority for giving guidance and training, as well as for hearing "the most serious" cases. Perhaps more controversially it would also seek to monitor the performance of local standards committees and to assume the functions of those that were not performing well. It will be a matter of debate whether such a role should pass out of the control of the authority concerned.

To complete the process will require primary legislation. Although implementation will not be immediate, it should be completed within the

next four years at the most.

However, I will have completed five "Council" years as chairman of the committee in May 2006, and as I feel it would be desirable for a chairman to see the committee through the next stage, I have tendered my resignation to take effect on 26 April 2006.

I would like to offer my thanks to my fellow members and to the Director of Law and Administration and her staff for their courtesy and co-operation over the last few years.

Michael Ridley