



Tuesday 28 April 2009



Confidence in local democracy

## Annual return

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### Independent overview

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Does the standards committee have Terms of Reference?

Yes

What help do members receive on following the Code of Conduct?

As part of the annual training programme the Standards Committee run a specific course on the Code of Conduct and Interest matters. This course is open to dsitric and parish members and Parish Clerk. Additional courses are arranged of the Code of Conduct changes. Individual sessions are held between members and the monitoring officer on request. The Deputy Monitoring Officer attends Parish/Town Council meetings on request

Does the standards committee have a forward work plan?

No

Is the standards committee given a role in reviewing amendments to the Authority's Constitution (or Standing Orders where appropriate)?

Yes

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 review elements of the Constitution that are relevant to their terms of reference and on the ethical framework but not in a general way. The last element that was reviewed was our Planning Protocol. There is a provision to advise on other parts of the Constitution if requested by the Council.

### Standards committee meetings.

Please use the table below to indicate how many times between 01/04/2008 and 31/03/2009 the standards committee has met and for what reasons.

Reason for meeting	Number of times met between 01/04/2008 and 31/03/2009
General meeting of whole standards committee	4
Training	1
Assessment sub-committee	4
Review sub-committee	2
Consideration meeting	0
Hearing	1
Other	0



### Standards committee - annual report

Does the standards committee produce an annual report on its own work?

Yes

Is the annual report received by a meeting of the full authority?

Yes

Is the annual report sent to all members?

Yes

Is the annual report sent to all senior officers?

Yes

How is the annual report publicised to the general public?

The Standards Committee Annual Report forms part of the Council's e-annual report and is publicised as part of the the publication of that document each year. It is also sent to the Parish and Town Council's



### Standards committee - promoting standards

What else does the standards committee do to communicate the role of the standards committee and the importance of high standards internally within the authority to members and officers?

It has a link to the Corporate Governance Group which is an officer grouping which promotes the governance issues including standards to the council's members and officers. The Standards Committee of this council has always had independant members before it was a requirement. The Standards Committee has been proactive in giving advice to Parish/Town Councils on dsipensations and processes.

What else has the standards committee done to promote confidence in local democracy to the wider public?

- It has always allowed press to attend Hearings - Officers have been proactive in speaking to the local press about standards matters and by way of giving information - The Standards Committee has always been transparent in having all its agenda and minutes available through the council's website and this includes the Subcommittees

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?

No



### Standards committee - training

Between 01/04/2008 and 31/03/2009, has the authority assessed the training and development needs of members in relation to their responsibilities on standards of conduct?

Yes

What training needs were identified?

- The requirement to hold training on a revised Planning Protocol once review completed - A new training course on the new complaints process

Please provide a list of training and development opportunities that have been provided to members and officers in the period from 01/04/2008 and 31/03/2009, 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, hearings etc.

Standards Committee received training delivered in conjunction with Braintree District Council on the new Assessment processes on 12 May 2008. The Assessments/Review Officers attended a training session at Bevan Brittan on the new regulations on 27 May 2008. The MO and DMO attended an MO training course on 18 February 2009.



### Leadership

How often has the standards committee, or its chair, met the chief executive to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009)?

None

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

How often has the standards committee, or its chair, met the leader of the council to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009)?

None

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

How often has the standards committee, or its chair, met the other party group leaders to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009)?

None

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

Does the standards committee, or its chair, have regular access to the monitoring officer? How regular?

Yes. The MO attends all Standards Committee meetings and briefings for the chairmen of the various committees and subcommittees.

How many times in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009) has the standards committee chair been invited to address a full authority meeting?

One

Does the monitoring officer sit on the Corporate Management Team, or equivalent?

Yes

Has an executive member (or senior member where appropriate) been given portfolio responsibility for standards?

No



## **Complaints**

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

Yes

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

At the beginning of the process the Standards Committee placed a notice as required by the regulations. The website has a specific page dedicated to conduct of councillors together with guidance notes on the procedure to be adopted and the assessment criteria, complaint form. The members of the standards committee have been interviewed by the local press on conduct issues.

Has the authority sought feedback from any of those people involved in an allegation of member misconduct about their satisfaction with the member conduct complaint process (for example the complainant, witnesses or person against whom the allegation was made)? Please choose from responses below.

No, have not sought feedback

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

a) members

This question has been taken to mean post Hearing Subcommittee All members receive notification of Standards Committee agenda on which there is a regular item about the progress/outcome of investigations. Individual members are written to by letter if they are involved in a complaint

b) officers

Senior Officers are notified of Standards Committee agenda on which there is a regular item about the progress/outcome of investigations. Progress on complaints forms a regular discussion item on the agenda of the Corporate Governance Group

## c) the general public

The public have access to Standards Committee, Assessment Subcommittee, Review Subcommittee and Hearing Subcommittee agenda (non-exempt sections) and minutes via our committee management system on our website. Public can self register to be informed of publication events i.e. Agenda and minutes publications. The press are also informed of Hearing meetings and the Standards Committee endeavor to hold Hearings in public if at all possible.

How does the authority communicate the outcome of allegations into member conduct which have NOT resulted in an investigation (for example those allegations which have not been referred for investigation and those allegations which have resulted in other action) to:

## a) members

All members receive notification of Standards Committee agenda on which there is a regular item about the progress/outcome of investigations. If a members is the complainant or subject member, they receive a formal letter about the outcome.

## b) officers

Senior Officers are notified of Standards Committee agenda on which there is a regular item about the progress/outcome of investigations. Complaints are a standing item on the Corporate Governance Group agenda

## c) the general public

The public have access to Standards Committee, Assessment Subcommittee, Review Subcommittee and Hearing Subcommittee agenda (non-exempt sections) and minutes via our committee management system on our website. Public can self register to be informed of publication events i.e. Agenda and minutes publications.



### Member officer relations

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Does the authority have a protocol for relations between members and officers?

Yes

How is the protocol communicated to officers and members?

As part of training sessions on code of conduct

What is the mechanism for reviewing the effectiveness of this protocol?

The review would come to the Standards Committee who would make recommendations to the full Council.

Does the authority include training on the importance of high standards of behaviour in the inductions of new members and officers?

Yes

Does the authority have informal mechanisms for dealing with member/officer and member/member disputes?

Yes

Please provide details of any mechanisms and, if possible, provide an example where this has been used.

The MO and DMO are available to give advice on disputes and help mediate where this is possible or give advice on the possible mechanisms for resolution. An example this year is the MO attended a meeting with Parish Members to help mediate in a dispute which was caused by lack of communication between members, helping avoid the issue escalating.



### Registering member interests

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Is the member register of interests accessible to the public on the authority website?

Yes

Is the register of gifts and hospitality available to the public on the authority website?

Yes

What does the authority do to signal to members the importance of declaring interests and completing the register of interests and the register of gifts and hospitality?

- It publishes regular reminders about interests in the members bulletin and also send reminders to Parish/Town Council's - an annual review of declarations and gifts is undertaken which includes both District and Parish/town councillors and clerks.



### Officer conduct

Does the authority have a code of conduct for senior officers?

Yes

Does the authority compile a register of senior officers' interests?

Yes

If yes, is the register of senior officers' interests available to the public on the authority website?

no

Does the authority compile a register of senior officers' gifts and hospitality?

Yes

If yes, is the senior officers' register of gifts and hospitality available to the public on the authority website?

No



### Optional questions

The following questions are optional; you do not have to complete them if you do not wish to. However, this information would be useful to us in helping us to raise ethical standards.

On what issues, if any, would you appreciate more support or guidance on from the Standards Board for England?

- Availability of external investigators. The Standards Board could be more helpful in maintaining a list without recommendation or endorsement. - by providing further guidance about the relationship of confidentiality and the data protection act and the freedom of information act. - That the Standards Board should, by way of courtesy, advise the district MO if they are giving advice to local members or public that might give rise to complaint. - The documents on process don't completely follow through all the steps to be followed by MO's eg A process diagram showing what letters and action are required from start to finish would be helpful.

The Standards Board for England, the Improvement and Development Agency and the Audit Commission have developed a toolkit that authorities can use to assess the ethical governance arrangements in their authority, and also to identify improvements.

Has your authority used the ethical governance toolkit?

Yes

