

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

ROLE AND WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

<p>1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT</p>

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| <p>1.1 To determine the means to be pursued in enhancing the role and working arrangements of the Standards Committee</p> |
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2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Committee at its last meeting (26 November 2009) considered various outline proposals for promoting the role of the Standards Committee which were put forward based on the Annual Report format devised by Standards for England and criteria adopted by the Audit Commission.
- 2.2 This report looks in more detail at some of those suggestions with a view to moving forward on those selected.
- 2.3 At present the committee agenda comprises regular items and other items brought forward by officers or members which happen to be current. It is suggested that the officers in conjunction with the Chair and Vice Chair look to establish a forward work plan for the Committee which would set out topics it wished to deal with. In setting such a plan it may be that involvement could be sought from other members and officers not associated with the Committee.
- 2.4 Although as Monitoring Officer I produce an annual report on complaints and any lessons to be learned it may be more useful for that information to be merged into an annual report produced by the Committee itself on its work during the year.
- 2.5 Establishing means of communicating complaints and outcomes of investigations to members, officers and the public and learning from them. At present although statutory processes are followed there is little sharing of the outcome of assessments on complaints received and determinations. In the interests of learning and transparency members are asked to consider what (if any) information should be disseminated to members of this Committee, members of the council and the public at large.
- 2.6 Other measures which can be taken to promote the work of the Standards Committee and to demonstrate that standards has a high profile in the Council would be for the annual report to be presented at

Council; for the Chair to meet the Chief Executive and Leaders of both Groups on say a six monthly basis to discuss any concerns, how the process is working and current issues.

2.7 Information as to how complaints can be made including an on line form are on the Council's website. A review of the contents of the website could be carried out to ensure that the maximum use is being made of it in promoting the role of standards. Placing the Register of Members Interests on the website is still being looked into together with various other criteria and procedures used in connection with the complaints process. Additionally should articles appear from time to time in Direct giving information about the activities of the Standards Committee and the processes and procedures it follows under the ethical framework. How widely should material from Standards for England be distributed? Does the Council need to consider surveying public perceptions to gain awareness of current understanding before taking steps to build up the profile of standards and public confidence in it. On a more limited basis once the investigation process has been stabilised should surveys be taken of participants to ascertain how the process can be improved?

2.8 As the Council is working increasingly in partnership with other bodies does more work need to be done in respect of governance arrangements? Additionally should the Committee act as sounding board as regards planning/licensing codes; officers' code of conduct; any codes and protocols of the authority including member-officer relations?

2.9 The Council already carries out an assessment of training and development needs of members and the ethical framework forms part of the training programme which is reviewed annually. A session for parish clerks is being piloted to ascertain its value.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Moving forward on as many of these issues as possible should enable the Council to present itself favourably as regards steps it has taken to promote the Ethical Framework.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

4.1 Implementation of the issues will be carried out within current financial, staffing and IT resources.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

5.1 None

6. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

6.1 None to date.

7. RECOMMENDATION

7.1 To consider the steps to be taken.

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