

Standards Committee

27 May 2011



Town and Parish Council Sub Committee

Report of Tina Naples, Chair of the Town and Parish Council Sub Committee

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an update to members in relation to the work undertaken by the Town and Parish Council Sub Committee of the Standards Committee.

Work of the Sub Committee

2. Since last reporting to Standards Committee in February 2011 the work of the Town and Parish Council sub-committee has significantly increased. Many more visits to councils have been made or scheduled – the full list since we began our work is at Appendix 1.
3. The universal issues raised have been the Code of Conduct and concerns about the future when the current standards regime comes to an end. It has also been possible to clarify confusion surrounding the position of “dual-hatted” members. We have been heartened by the support for the Code of Conduct but it is important to bring forward how local councils are worrying about their ability to cope in future.
4. We have been advocating that local councils do adopt a code of conduct under the new arrangements and most of them seem to want to do this. However, it would clearly be neither feasible nor desirable for all 104 of them to write their own individual code. Some clerks are already discussing with their counterparts on ways of collaborating on this or other issues. Another way forward might be for the County Council to issue its own code (if it does indeed adopt one) to be used as a template for local councils to make use of.
5. Cost is another major area of concern, particularly if complaints need to be investigated. It would not be possible for clerks to investigate matters related to their own council and this is another possible area of collaboration with other councils in order to keep a rein on costs. Whether the County Council might be able to offer a low cost investigation service is something that might be worth considering.

6. An overriding matter coming from clerks is that they are already overstretched, often working more than their contracted hours to keep the present requirements fulfilled. They are seriously concerned about their ability to meet more demands on their time. With the limited funding available to local councils it is difficult to see how some of them will be able to get around this matter.
7. Finally, we have started issuing feedback forms to gauge the usefulness of the visits. The results are extremely positive and a couple of councils have asked for a return visit for more detailed discussions.

Recommendation

8. Standards Committee is invited to note the content of this report.

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