

Standards Committee

9 September 2016



Committee on Standards in Public Life - Annual Report 2015-16 / Forward Plan 2016-17

Report of Colette Longbottom, Head of Legal & Democratic Services

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To report on the activities of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Committee) in relation to Local Government standards over the course of the past year and the Committee's forward plan of work for 2016-17.

Background

- 2 The Committee monitors, reports and makes recommendations on all issues relating to standards in public life. This includes not only the standards of conduct of holders of public office but all those involved in the delivery of public services.
- 3 One of the Committee's strategic objectives is to monitor ethical standards across public services as a whole by maintaining a watching brief to identify emerging or persistent standards issues and respond promptly to them. The Committee also undertakes independent quantitative and qualitative research into public perceptions of ethical standards and responds to consultations and key policy announcements and legislation where these impact on ethical standards, where the Committee has an informed contribution to make.

Overview of Local Government Standards for 2015-2016

- 4 The Committee has a long-standing interest in Local Government standards and in its 2014-15 annual report stated that it had agreed at the time of the Localism Act to maintain a watching brief on:
 - The need for a mandatory code of conduct
 - Strong local leadership
 - Effective, independent persons
 - Concern at the lack of sanctions

- 5 The Committee notes in its annual report that there is some evidence to suggest that the role of the independent person is generally well received and that vexatious complaints are falling. However the effectiveness of the sanctions regime is still a concern. In its report the Committee states that it maintains a watching brief of national and local media on this issue as well as correspondence. It receives correspondence both from members of the public, councils and councillors on this issue. This correspondence includes, for example, calls for a national code of conduct, strengthened guidelines and sanctions of a power of recall. The Committee says that it promotes the seven Nolan principles which represent common standards and core values. The Committee continues to invite councils to consider whether their own local standards frameworks are sufficient to address standards breaches and build public trust.

Forward Plan 2016-17

- 6 The Committee states that it regularly receives correspondence on the issues of ethical standards in local government at both officer and elected member level. Looking ahead, it intends to undertake a review to clarify the topics of substantive concern, research the underlying causes and to identify best practice in well-governed authorities. This work is to straddle the Committee's work program for 2016-17 and 2017-18.

Conclusion

- 7 The Committee is aware of the concerns within Local Government standards regimes and will be keeping these under review.

Recommendations and reasons

- 8 That Standards Committee receive the report.

Background Papers

Committee on Standards in Public Life Annual Report 2015-16 and Forward Plan 2016-17

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance - None

Staffing - None

Risk - None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty - None

Accommodation - None

Crime and Disorder - None

Human Rights - None

Consultation - None

Procurement - None

Disability Issues - None

Legal Implications - None