



Standards Committee

30 October 2008

Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees – 13 and 14 October 2008

Summary of Report

This report provides members with an opportunity to report back to the Standards Committee on their attendance at the Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees held at the International Convention Centre, Birmingham on 13 and 14 October 2008.

Recommendation

- (1) That the content of the Report be noted

Resource Considerations:

Financial:

None arising from this report

Legal:

None arising from this report

Staffing:

None arising from this report

Citizen Impact:

None arising from this report

Community Safety:

None arising from this report

Environmental:

None arising from this report

Performance and Risk Management:**Risk:**

None arising from this report

Performance Management:

None arising from this report

Equality Implications:

This report complies fully with the Council's policies on equality and diversity

Consultation:

None arising from this report

Background papers:

All published

Signed:

Assistant Director of Legal and Constitutional Services

Date: 20 October 2008

Contact officer

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Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees

The Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees was held at the International Convention Centre in Birmingham on Monday, 13 and Tuesday, 14 October 2008.

The event was attended by Councillor B Cassidy, Mr R Meller and Mr L Bates.

The focus of this years Assembly was “Delivering the goods – Local Standards in Action” which addresses the bigger picture highlighting the key issues of governance and ethics. The Conference focused on ways that develop an exemplary standards committee, promote good governance and build public confidence in members.

The wide range of sessions also covered the local standards system including managing local assessment, investigations and determinations, mediation and handling complex complaints. Guidance on the Code was provided in a number of sessions including “the Code made clear” and a specialist session which focussed on the issue of planning.

Attached as an appendix is a copy of a joint report which has been prepared by the Chairman, vice-chairman and Councillor Cassidy who attended the Assembly (appendix 1).

The Annual Assembly took the form that it had on previous years and consisted of addresses to the delegates by senior public servants, which included:

- Dr Robert Chilton, Chair – Standards Board for England
- Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive – Standards Board for England
- Sadiq Khan MP, Department of Communities & Local Government

A total of 21 Workshops and breakout sessions were held over the two days of the Conference.

Plenary sessions covered:

- Opening plenary which addressed ways of supporting local standards, local standards in action – the first six months and over to you (question and answer session)
- A higher level
- Making an impact?
- Closing plenary which wrapped up the conference and answered delegates final questions

Mini plenary sessions covered:

- Getting up to speed

- What went wrong?
- Mind the gap – setting standards for joint working
- The Code made clear
- Communicating with communities
- In confidence
- Keeping track of standards – monitoring and support
- Joining the dots – understanding corporate governance
- The parish perspective

Workshops covered:

- Alternative action master class
- Balancing act
- Delivering local assessment
- Delivering local investigations
- First response
- Delivering local determinations and setting sanctions
- Mediation in action
- Planning ahead
- The parish perspective
- Focus on fire, police and park authorities

Question and answer sessions covered:

- Questions and answers: new Standards Committee members
- Question and answers: Monitoring Officers
- Question and answers: Standard Committee members
- Questions and answers: all delegates

In addition a number fringe events were held that included:

- Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors
- The Association of Independent Members of Standards Committees in England
- Improvement and Development Agency
- Local Government Ombudsman
- Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers

SEVENTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

13-14 OCTOBER 2008 ICC, BIRMINGHAM

Attended by Roy Meller, Len Bates and Councillor Barbara Cassidy

Over 800 delegates from Local Authorities throughout England attended this year's Annual Assembly of Standards Committees, the theme of which was "Delivering the Goods". There was a good cross-section of independent members, councillors from every political party, monitoring officers, and others. It was very thought provoking, especially for newcomers to Standards, and there is an important opportunity to "network" with such a wide range of delegates.

The newly appointed Chair of the Standards Board for England, Dr Robert Chilton, opened the Assembly by referring to the first six months of the new local framework. He said that he believed that local authorities had done an outstanding job, and would welcome hearing more about their experiences. Sadiq Khan, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State - Communities and Local Government, who said that the devolution of the "conduct regime" had been a success, also addressed the assembly. He thought that the revised Code of Conduct had bedded in well, but announced that it is now time to make revisions. A consultation process is under way, and the thinking is that the Code should possibly be in two parts – one dealing with members' role as Councillors, and the other with their private lives. The aim is that the Code should not prevent councillors achieving their potential.

The Assembly heard from other speakers as to the current situation with Standards. The perception is that standards have improved, but worryingly public awareness on a range of issues remains poor, and there is no sign that the public are any happier, despite the new arrangements.

There were a number of breakout sessions, including one aimed at new members of Standards Committees, with others dealing with case studies, various procedural and administrative matters, and question-and-answer opportunities. One significant point to emerge was that members of Standards Committees should have regular meetings with Chief Executives and Leaders of Councils to discuss issues and developments.

The Walsall representatives found the Assembly very helpful and informative, and recommend that as many new members as possible attend in future.