

## Standards Committee – 7 October 2013

### Committee on Standards in Public Life

#### 1. Summary of report

To bring to the attention of the Committee the Annual Report 2012/13 of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

#### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the report be noted.
- 2.2 That the report be forwarded to Group Leaders for their information.

#### 3. Report detail

The appended report is an overview of the Committee's work over the course of 2012/13. The Committee on Standards in Public Life has a wide remit and this is reflected in the report which is attached as an **Appendix** to this report.

The report refers to three issues which may be of direct interest to members and these are briefly:

- (1) On page 8 of the report reference is made to the seven principles of public life which were first established by the Committee in its first report which was produced in 1995. The Committee agreed after re-examining the seven principles of public life that they should be kept as they are but that brief descriptions be appended to each one to provide clarification. The seven principles and the explanations can be read on the inside front cover of the report attached.
- (2) On page 14 of the report the Committee addresses local government standards and the changes brought in under the Localism Act 2011. The Committee state that while it recognises that the new system needs time to properly bed in they do have certain concerns which they set out on pages 14, 15 and 16 of the report.
- (3) On page 18 of the report the Committee sets out issues over which it intends to keep a watching brief. The two issues which concern Councils directly are:
  - (a) Local government standards – concerns about the impact of the regime introduced by the Localism Act 2011; and

- (b) Electoral arrangements – concerns about electoral fraud particularly in relation to the electoral register and postal voting.

(4) In addition to the above there has been a article by Paul Hoey of Hoey Ainscough Associates Limited who work with Local Authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct in Local Government published in the Municipal Journal (12.09.13). Based on their work with 200 authorities they have found that whilst there are still frivolous or politically motivated complaints these are dealt with more more efficiently by councils monitoring officers where they have relevant powers delegated to them to deal with such complaints, without having to convene a committee meeting.

However difficulties had been experienced in managing more serious contentious complaints which reflects the criticisms made by the CSPL above. A number of serious allegations concerning councillors have been reported to the police for investigation but no prosecutions have been mounted. In addition some of the more serious interests councillors would have been expected to declare at meetings such as matters where their close family or business associates are the interested party are not covered by the offence. Concern has also been expressed by the fact that councils feel that they have insufficient sanctions to deal with member conduct now that the power to suspend councillors has been revoked.

Among other concerns mentioned are that the standards process has become more politicised since the removal of independent members from the standards committee. There is also a view that the politicisation of the process, coupled with the lack of effective sanction is feeding a growing view that councils are not taking councillor misconduct seriously enough.

## **Background papers**

Published

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Signed:

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