

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE
FRIDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2003 AT 10 A.M.**

Agenda Item No:

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STANDARDS COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Report of the County Secretary

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1. Purpose of the Report

The Committee at their last meeting asked the County Secretary to survey a sample of local authorities to see what responsibilities they give their Standards Committees, and report back to this meeting for information. This report summarises the outcome of that survey.

2. Information

Sixteen authorities including Hertfordshire were sampled (nine Counties, two City Councils and five Borough/District Councils) including a number of neighbouring authorities.

Of the sixteen, all Standards Committees of those Councils undertake the seven responsibilities currently vested in the Hertfordshire Standards Committee, namely:-

- Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct
- Advising the Council on the adoption / revision of the Members' Code of Conduct
- Assisting members to observe the Code
- Monitoring the operation of the Code
- Arranging training for members on the Code
- Granting dispensations from requirements relating to interests
- Dealing with casework referred to them by the Monitoring Officer or the Standards Board Ethical Standards Officer

Seven of the sixteen authorities (including Hertfordshire) give their Standards Committees no additional responsibilities.

Of the remaining nine the following additional responsibilities are bestowed on the appropriate Standards Committees (how these issues are dealt with in Hertfordshire are shown in the square brackets):-

Five recommend and then keep under review the Council's Whistleblowing procedure [Members are kept up to date by Officers]

Three oversee the Council's complaints procedure / Ombudsman cases [Officers deal – regular reports to members]

Two make payments in cases where maladministration is found [Officers in consultation with members]

Two oversee the Code of Standards for Officers [Officers]

Two are also the Independent Allowances Panel [separate Independent Panel]

Two oversee the operation of the Council's Constitution [Council]

The following responsibilities are also undertaken by Standards Committees within the sample taken, but in each case there is only one such example:-

- Advising the Council on Standing Orders relating to propriety [Monitoring Officer]
- Making Standing Orders relating to contracts / financial matters [Council]
- Advising specifically on Member / Officer protocols [This is in the Council's Constitution, following recommendations from the former Standards Panel]
- Appointing members to be on the Independent Allowances Panel [independent process]
- Undertaking officer disciplinary / grievance hearings (appeals) [Casework Committee]
- Giving specific advice to Council members serving on outside bodies [Monitoring Officer]
- Monitoring operation of Council's call-in procedure [Council]
- Undertaking certain election functions [Officers]
- Adoption and review of Council's Corporate Governance Framework [Cabinet]
- Agreeing an Audit Strategy [Audit Committee]
- Making representations to the Local Government Association on conduct matters [Monitoring Officer]
- Agreeing anti-fraud measures [Audit Committee]
- Overseeing the operation of the Council's management structures [Cabinet]

Background material used by the author in drafting this report:-

Websites of the following authorities:-

*Hertfordshire County Council
Buckinghamshire County Council
Cambridgeshire County Council
Essex County Council
Hampshire County Council
Lancashire County Council
Norfolk County Council
Surrey County Council
West Sussex County Council
Birmingham City Council
Cambridge City Council
East Herts District Council
Harlow Borough Council
Ipswich Borough Council
Watford Borough Council
Welwyn Hatfield District Council.*