

## **Report to Standards Committee**

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**Subject: Standards Committee Report 2010/11**

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### Background

Following the General Election in May 2010 the coalition Government introduced the Decentralisation and Localism Bill which included a proposal to abolish the “Standards Regime”, including the Code of Conduct for councillors, while at the same time imposing a duty on local authorities “to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by local authority members”. These proposals appeared contradictory.

The original proposals were that Local authorities would be free to adopt their own codes of practice for members, with failure to disclose and/or register interests becoming a criminal offence. This did not address the problem of behavioural abuse by members which, nationally, are far the most numerous source of complaints, and which despite government claims that many had been vexatious or frivolous, can potentially be serious, particularly with regard to member to member to staff relationships.

Many local authorities were concerned at this and the possibility of a model code being drawn up under the guidance of the LGA, or some other common interest group, for voluntary adoption was widely discussed.

### Summary 2010/11

Membership of the Committee, to meet the stipulations of Standards for England for independence of action, continues to consist of 3 elected members of the Borough, 4 independent members (including the Chairman) and 2 parish councillor representatives.

During 2010/11, one complaint was dealt with. This related to a parish; there were no complaints relating to Borough councillors.

A parish case, originating from an earlier period, did, after assessment, lead to a formal hearing at which the councillor involved was found to have treated others with disrespect. This finding resulted in a formal censure of the councillor.

During 2011/12 there were 3 meetings of the Standards Committee itself. These meetings were largely concerned with updates on the progress of the Decentralisation and Localism Bill and on discussions with neighbouring authorities on the consequences of the abolition of the Standards regime together with possible future action.

Attendance at the full committee meetings has been excess of 94%. Attendance at Assessment Sub-committee meetings and Hearings is, by definition, 100%.

Marginal expenditure for the Committee during 2010/11 amounted to £4,601 (compared with £10,415 the previous year). This comprised allowances and responsibility payments made to the independent members and chairman (at approved Council rates). No travel or subsistence expenses were claimed.

It should be noted that over the ten year life of the Committee, the only travel and subsistence claims made by independent members have been for attendance at the annual assemblies in Birmingham (the October 2010 assembly was cancelled). There have been no claims for overnight expenses, and none incurred.

### The Future

The Localism Bill continues its progress through Parliament and following a number of cross-party representations in the House of Lords, a several amendments have been tabled by the Government for inclusion in the Bill during its final stages in the House of Commons. These include making it mandatory for authorities to adopt a code of conduct reflecting the stipulations of the Nolan principles. However no specific code has yet been prescribed, nor are the methods by which such a code be monitored or enforced made clear.

At this stage, therefore, it is not possible to make any further proposals beyond the views of the Committee expressed at its February 2011 meeting.

### **Recommendation**

Members are requested to note the report