

## **REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

### **Meeting held on 17 April 2009**

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#### **Membership:**

Robert Rogers (Independent Member) (Chairman); Isabel Fox (Independent Member); Richard Gething (Town and Parish Council Representative); John Hardwick (Town and Parish Council Representative); David Stevens (Independent Member); Councillor John Stone; Councillor Beris Williams.

#### **STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND/HEREFORDSHIRE ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS JOINT PILOT PROJECT**

1. We heard a report of further progress on the Standards Board for England's pilot project to produce a model for compacts between Associations of Local Councils, the Society of Local Council Clerks, Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees, through assessing activities such as joint training, informal meetings between Standards Committees and Associations to ensure agreement on application of the Code of Conduct, and the production of joint guidance leaflets. It is very good that Herefordshire is one of only six authorities in the country invited to take part.
2. The pilot project will shortly be drawing to a close and the Herefordshire Association of Local Councils (HALC) has produced a draft report for the National Association of Local Councils, and a compact which explains how the Standards Committee interacts with HALC. The project has been extremely successful and has highlighted the exemplary working relationship between the Committee and HALC (not something replicated in every county). The Standards Board for England has employed consultants to conduct a review of the project, and they will engage our Committee members, HALC, and some of the participating parish and town councillors in their research.
3. We will update the existing guidance leaflets for Town and Parish Councils which we produce jointly with HALC, and will add two new ones as a result of the pilot project, which will help to explain the Council's planning process, and the Code of Conduct and the role of the Standards Committee since the introduction of the local filter.

#### **PRE-ELECTION PERIOD AND GUIDANCE FOR THE 2009 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS**

4. We have reviewed the guidance for Herefordshire Council about the statutory restrictions on Council publicity in the run-up to the 2009 European elections (the "pre-election period"), and this is now in circulation.

#### **STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2008**

5. We will publish our annual report for 2008 shortly. Our report for 2007 was widely distributed and very well received. It has been used as a template by other Standards Committees, and is now referred to by the Standards Board for England as an example of excellent practice.

**EXPERIENCE OF LOCAL FILTER CASES, AND DETERMINATIONS SO FAR**

6. We have reviewed progress made with complaints about local authority, town and parish councillors since the introduction of the local filter on 08 May 2008. In 2008, our Assessment Sub-Committee considered eighteen complaints, and so far in 2009, it has dealt with thirty. We noted with interest that the average number of complaints dealt with per quarter by Standards Committees from similar authorities is only two! The year will continue to be busy, with five local investigations under way, a hearing pending, and numerous referrals to the Standards Board having been made.
7. With this workload in mind, we are reviewing our administrative procedures for the local filter, to ensure maximum efficiency.

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

8. We conducted interviews for an additional post of Independent Member on 06 March 2009. The additional post is necessary to reduce the possibility of statutorily required independent chairs being conflicted out of the various stages of the local filter process. The interview panel consisted of Robert Rogers (Chairman), Councillor John Stone, John Hardwick, and Colonel Tony Ward OBE (Independent Member of the West Mercia Police Authority, and a member of that Authority's Standards Committee) as an external member. This was our second recruitment round in a process which started in August 2008, and once again, we interviewed some very impressive candidates. The panel was unanimous in recommending the appointment of Mr Jake Bharier, and we readily endorse that recommendation. Jake Bharier is a Strategic Advisor to Skillshare International, an international development non-government organisation, and he is Treasurer of CONCORD, the Europe-wide liaison group between non-government organisations and the European Union. He is Trustee of SOS Sahel International UK, and a member of their Risk Management Committee. He was previously a Tutor, Manager and National President of the Workers' Educational Association, and he also has extensive experience of working in the private sector, in health and safety. The Panel considered that he had the skills and experience to make a valuable contribution to the work of the Committee.

**RECOMMENDATION: that Mr Jake Bharier be appointed as an Independent Member of the Standards Committee.**

**ROBERT ROGERS  
CHAIRMAN  
STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

- Agenda papers of the meeting held on 17 April 2009.