

AGENDA

Standards Committee

Date: **Friday 2 October 2009**

Time: **2.00 pm**

Place: **The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road,
Hereford**

Notes: Please note the **time, date** and **venue** of the meeting.

For any further information please contact:

Heather Donaldson, Democratic Services Officer

Tel: 01432 261829

Email: hdonaldson@herefordshire.gov.uk

If you would like help to understand this document, or would like it in another format or language, please call Heather Donaldson, Democratic Services Officer on 01432 261829 or e-mail hdonaldson@herefordshire.gov.uk in advance of the meeting.

Agenda for the Meeting of the Standards Committee

Membership

| | | |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Chairman | Robert Rogers (Independent Member) | |
| | Jake Bharier | Independent Member |
| | Isabel Fox | Independent Member |
| | Richard Gething | Parish and Town Council Representative |
| | John Hardwick | Parish and Town Council Representative |
| | David Stevens | Independent Member |
| | John Stone | Local Authority Representative |
| | Beris Williams | Local Authority Representative |

GUIDANCE ON DECLARING PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS AT MEETINGS

The Council's Members' Code of Conduct requires Councillors to declare against an Agenda item(s) the nature of an interest and whether the interest is personal or prejudicial. Councillors have to decide first whether or not they have a personal interest in the matter under discussion. They will then have to decide whether that personal interest is also prejudicial.

A personal interest is an interest that affects the Councillor more than most other people in the area. People in the area include those who live, work or have property in the area of the Council. Councillors will also have a personal interest if their partner, relative or a close friend, or an organisation that they or the member works for, is affected more than other people in the area. If they do have a personal interest, they must declare it but can stay and take part and vote in the meeting.

Whether an interest is prejudicial is a matter of judgement for each Councillor. What Councillors have to do is ask themselves whether a member of the public – if he or she knew all the facts – would think that the Councillor's interest was so important that their decision would be affected by it. If a Councillor has a prejudicial interest then they must declare what that interest is. A Councillor who has declared a prejudicial interest at a meeting may nevertheless be able to address that meeting, but only in circumstances where an ordinary member of the public would be also allowed to speak. In such circumstances, the Councillor concerned will have the same opportunity to address the meeting and on the same terms. However, a Councillor exercising their ability to speak in these circumstances must leave the meeting immediately after they have spoken.

AGENDA

Pages

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive any declarations of interest by Members in respect of items on the agenda.

3. MINUTES

To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2009.

4. APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATIONS RECEIVED FROM PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

To consider applications for dispensations received from Parish and Town Councils.

Wards: County Wide

(Note: at the time that this agenda went to print, no applications had been received. If any applications for dispensations are received before the meeting, and oral report will be given.)

5. THE NEW CONSTITUTION

To receive a presentation from the Interim Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic) on the proposals for a new constitution for Herefordshire Council.

Wards: County Wide**6. LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHRONICLE AWARDS 2010**

To agree the basis of the Committee's entry in the Standards and Ethics category of the LGC Awards 2010.

Wards: County Wide**7. MODERN.GOV**

To consider a briefing note (to be tabled at the meeting) in respect of using Modern.Gov software to manage the local filter process.

Wards: County Wide**8. STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND BULLETIN 45**

To consider the latest bulletin from Standards for England.

Wards: County Wide

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9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Standards Committee will be held on Friday 08 January 2010 at 2.00 p.m. in the Council Chamber at Brockington.

Future meeting dates are as follows:

- 16 April 2010.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

In the opinion of the Proper Officer, the following item will not be, or is likely not to be, open to the public and press at the time it is considered.

RECOMMENDATION: that under section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12(A) of the Act, as indicated below

10. LOCAL FILTER CASES AND DETERMINATIONS

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- To update the Committee about progress made with complaints about local authority, town and parish councillors during the period from 08 May 2008 to the present.
- To share recent experiences of the local filter and determinations process, with a view to maintaining best practice.

Wards: County Wide

(This item contains information which is subject to an obligation of confidentiality)

Your Rights to Information and Attendance at Meetings

YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO:-

- Attend all Council, Cabinet, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings unless the business to be transacted would disclose 'confidential' or 'exempt information'.
- Inspect agenda and public reports at least three clear days before the date of the meeting.
- Inspect minutes of the Council and all Committees and Sub-Committees and written statements of decisions taken by the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members for up to six years following a meeting.
- Inspect background papers used in the preparation of public reports for a period of up to four years from the date of the meeting. A list of the background papers to a report is given at the end of each report. A background paper is a document on which the officer has relied in writing the report and which otherwise is not available to the public.
- Access to a public register stating the names, addresses and wards of all Councillors with details of the membership of Cabinet and all Committees and Sub-Committees.
- Have a reasonable number of copies of agenda and reports (relating to items to be considered in public) made available to the public attending meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Committees and Sub-Committees.
- Have access to a list specifying those powers on which the Council have delegated decision making to their officers identifying the officers concerned by title.
- Copy any of the documents mentioned above to which you have a right of access, subject to a reasonable charge.
- Access to this summary of your rights as members of the public to attend meetings of the Council, Cabinet, its Committees and Sub-Committees and to inspect and copy documents.
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Please Note:

Agenda and individual reports can be made available in large print. Please contact the officer named on the front cover of this agenda **in advance** of the meeting who will be pleased to deal with your request.

The meeting venue is accessible for visitors in wheelchairs.

A public telephone is available in the reception area.

Public Transport Links

- Public transport access can be gained to Brockington via bus route 75.
- The service runs every half hour from the 'Hopper' bus station at the Tesco store in Bewell Street (next to the roundabout junction of Blueschool Street / Victoria Street / Edgar Street).
- The nearest bus-stop to Brockington is located in Old Eign Hill near to its junction with Hafod Road. The return journey can be made from the same bus stop.

If you have any questions about this agenda, how the Council works or would like more information or wish to exercise your rights to access the information described above, you may do so either by telephoning officer named on the front cover of this agenda or by visiting in person during office hours (8.45 a.m. - 5.00 p.m. Monday - Thursday and 8.45 a.m. - 4.45 p.m. Friday) at the Council Offices, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford.

COUNTY OF HEREFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

BROCKINGTON, 35 HAFOD ROAD, HEREFORD.

FIRE AND EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

In the event of a fire or emergency the alarm bell will ring continuously.

You should vacate the building in an orderly manner through the nearest available fire exit.

You should then proceed to Assembly Point J which is located at the southern entrance to the car park. A check will be undertaken to ensure that those recorded as present have vacated the building following which further instructions will be given.

Please do not allow any items of clothing, etc. to obstruct any of the exits.

Do not delay your vacation of the building by stopping or returning to collect coats or other personal belongings.



Code revision

We reported on Communities and Local Government's consultation on proposals for a revised code for members and the introduction of a national code for officers in [issue 41](#) of the *Bulletin*.

Many of you have been in touch to find out when you can expect the new code for members. The department for Communities and Local Government is responsible for dealing with the revisions and current advice is that a revised code will be ready in late autumn 2009.

We do not anticipate many changes to the Code this time around. The main change will be to allow the Code to cover members in their non-official capacity, where that conduct would be a criminal offence.

We have been informed that further consultation on the introduction of a code for officers is likely to take place in 2010.

Imposing sanctions: Written apologies

Regulation 19 of the [Standards Committee \(England\) Regulations 2008](#) lists the 11 sanctions available to a standards committee. Standards committees must be careful that any sanctions they choose are included in this list. For example, a verbal apology is not listed and would not therefore be a valid sanction. Asking a member to submit a written apology in a form specified by the committee is valid.

The written apology sanction is a difficult sanction to enforce if a member chooses not to comply with it. Standards committees should consider this when deciding on which sanction to impose.

If a standards committee decides that a written apology is appropriate it should:

- specify the form in which the apology should be written
- set a time-limit for the apology to be written.

If a member fails to issue the written apology, the member may face a further complaint of potentially bringing their office or authority into disrepute by failing to comply with the sanction. However, it could be argued that it would be a better use of council resources to ensure the original sanction allows for the possibility that the apology is not given.

The regulations allow for the suspension of a member for a period not exceeding six months or until such time as the member submits a written apology in a form specified

by the standards committee. In this way a standards committee can ensure that if a member does not apologise, they will remain suspended for a period of up to six months or until they do.

Care should be taken when deciding on the period of suspension that would apply if no apology is given. It should properly reflect the seriousness of the breach of the code of conduct. Imposing a six month suspension period to encourage an apology to be given would be a misuse of the power.

Standards committees should carefully consider the appropriateness of imposing a written apology when a member has shown no remorse for their conduct and no evidence at the hearing to indicate they are able to acknowledge their behaviour and its impact on others. Any apology issued in such circumstances is unlikely to be seen as being genuine.

For more information on sanctions please see our [Standards Committee Determinations guidance](#).

Intimidation and the Code

On July 23 2009, the President of the Adjudication Panel for England made a significant decision in the case of Councillor Buchanan, an ex-councillor of Somerset County Council.

This is an important judgment as it is the first occasion in which the Adjudication Panel had to deal with a potential breach of paragraph 3(2)(c) of the Code of Conduct. Paragraph 3(2)(c) concerns the intimidation of, or an attempt to intimidate, a complainant in a Code of Conduct investigation.

The Facts

In April 2007, the Chief Executive of Somerset County Council made a number of complaints about Councillor Buchanan's behaviour to Standards for England. Later on that year, Councillor Buchanan made a formal complaint to the council about the Chief Executive's conduct which the council decided not to investigate.

Following a further complaint from the Chief Executive about Councillor Buchanan, the council's Liberal Democrat group asked Councillor Buchanan if he would suspend himself from the group pending the outcome of all ongoing investigations, but he declined. Councillor Buchanan was notified that his membership of the Liberal Democrat group had been formally revoked on 5 December 2007.

On that same day, Councillor Buchanan wrote a letter to the Association of Local Authority Chief Executives, (ALACE) stating formal complaints about the Chief Executive and listed five headings of inappropriate and unacceptable types of behaviour that the Chief Executive had allegedly committed. And five days later, he sent a letter in identical terms to the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE).

On 15 December 2007 Councillor Buchanan further wrote a formal complaint to the council's monitoring officer in almost identical terms.

The Chief Executive then complained about Councillor Buchanan's motivation and intent in making the serious allegations about him in the letters. This was because Councillor Buchanan knew that Chief Executive was the complainant in an ongoing investigation.

Against these facts the Tribunal had to decide whether:

- Councillor Buchanan had brought his office or authority into disrepute
- had used his position to improperly disadvantage the Chief Executive
- had intimidated or attempted to intimidate the Chief Executive.

The respondent's case was that he had either witnessed or been told about the Chief Executive's alleged behaviour and had previously raised his concerns about the behaviour with various senior officers of the council.

The Adjudication Panel's findings

The Tribunal's findings were that Councillor Buchanan had not voiced the concerns he was now alleging and that:

- although he may have formed a belief about the seriousness of the alleged behaviour, there was no evidence to suggest that it was reasonable for him to have done so
- whatever he had seen, he did not at the time regard the alleged incidents as seriously as he was asserting at the time he wrote the letters
- he had knowingly exaggerated the facts about the Chief Executive's style and performance in order to strengthen his allegations of serious misconduct.

Counsel for the ethical standards officer (ESO) had helpfully referred the Adjudication Panel to the Shorter Oxford Dictionary definition of the word 'intimidate' as meaning terrify, overawe, cow. The dictionary suggested the word was now used especially in order to mean to force to or to deter from some act by threats of violence.

Counsel for the ESO also referred the Tribunal to R v Patresca [2004] EWCA Crim 2437, which concerned an offence under Section 51 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. This proves that a person commits an offence if he or she does an act:

(a) which intimidates and is intended to intimidate another person (the victim)

(b) knowing or believing that the victim is assisting in the investigation of an offence or is a witness or potential witness

(c) intending thereby to cause the investigation or the course of justice to be obstructed perverted or interfered with.

The Court of Appeal noted that the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act provided that "an intimidatory act which consists of threats may threaten financial as well as physical harm".

In the course of the judgment, May LJ confirmed that 'intimidate' and 'intimidation' are ordinary English words and endorsed the dictionary definition referred to above and stated:

"In our judgement, a person does an act which intimidates another person within section 51 (1) (a) of the 1944 Act if he puts the victim in fear. He also does it if he seeks to deter the victim from some relevant action by threat or violence. A threat unaccompanied by violence may be sufficient and the threat need not necessarily be a threat of violence. The act must be intended to intimidate. The person doing the act has to know that the

victim is a ...witness or potential witness..., He has to do the act intending thereby for the cause of justice to be obstructed, perverted or interfered with. A person may intimidate another person without the victim being intimidated...An act may amount to intimidation even though the victim is sufficiently steadfast not to be intimidated.

"In our judgement pressure to change evidence alone is insufficient, Pressure alone might be unexceptional and entirely proper at least if applied in an honest belief, for instance that what was sought was evidence which would be truthful. Alternatively pressure might be improper but lack any element of intimidation, for example a bribe. For a person to intimidate another person the pressure must put the victim in some fear, or if not there must nevertheless be an element of threat or violence such that the pressure is improper pressure."

Against this background, the Case Tribunal had no doubt that in writing the letters to ALACE and SOLACE and later to the council, Councillor Buchanan was motivated by a desire to cause harm to the Chief Executive whom he saw as responsible for the collapse of his political career.

The Case Tribunal was also in no doubt that in writing those letters, the respondent intended to cause the Chief Executive a disadvantage both in terms of his future employment with the council or more widely. Because those letters were submitted essentially as an act of revenge, the respondent did use his position improperly and had thus failed to follow the provisions of paragraph 6(a) of the council's Code of Conduct.

The Tribunal also found that even though there was no evidence that the Chief Executive was intimidated, that did not of itself mean that the allegation of a breach of paragraph 3 (c) failed. There would still be such a breach if the respondent had attempted such intimidation.

The Case Tribunal believed that for the claim to succeed it would have to accept that the letters were intended to intimidate the Chief Executive into:

- altering any evidence he was called upon to give against the Councillor; **or**
- not making further complaints about the Councillor.

On the facts of this particular case the Case Tribunal concluded that neither were Councillor Buchanan's intention. The evidence here was that the respondent was seeking revenge for the Chief Executive's past actions rather than seeking to intimidate him. Therefore there was no breach of paragraph 3(c) of the council's Code.

The Case Tribunal's view was that the respondent, in allowing his actions to be motivated by his desire for revenge, had shown himself to be unfit to be a councillor and local authorities should be protected from his membership.

Although the respondent had by then ceased to be a councillor, he was disqualified was two years.

You can read the Adjudication Panel's decision in this case on its [website](#).

New organisational design for SfE

During the summer, Standards for England has been making progress with an internal restructure which coincides with three new senior officers taking up their posts.

Our three new directors are Director of Risk Vivienne Horton, Director of Regulation Tim Leslie, and Director of Standards Steve Barrow.

The restructuring allows us to align our resources more closely with our role as a strategic regulator and to deliver the tasks we have set ourselves in our corporate plan. Our day-to-day Regulation activities – investigations, guidance, liaison and monitoring – fall within our new Regulation directorate.

In the new Risk directorate, Vivienne leads on our approach to assessing and managing standards risks. Within the new Standards directorate we are developing our knowledge base, our approach to strategic regulation and, of course, our own standards.

Corporate Plan and Annual Report published

Our Annual Report for 2008-09 was laid before Parliament in July. It contained a summary of our work and all of the required corporate reporting of financial arrangements.

We think you'll be more interested in our Annual Review of 2008-09 which we expect to publish in the autumn. That's a little later in the year than we've published our annual review in the past, but we wanted this year to be able to include a significant digest of the information supplied to us by authorities in our annual returns.

The document will be in two parts – a review of our work at Standards for England, and a review of the first year of the local framework based on the information you've supplied us. We'll be highlighting plenty of examples of what we consider to be notable practice, and setting out some of the issues we wish to tackle as regulator, based on what you've said.

Copies will be distributed to all authorities and we'll publish online too.

In the early part of this year, we've been operating to a draft corporate plan pending sign off by the responsible minister in our sponsor department, Communities and Local Government. The plan was signed off earlier in the summer and we have now published our corporate plan under the title of The Changing Role of the Standards Board for England.

Copies have been sent to monitoring officers and it is also available to download [here](#).

Review of online monitoring system - an update

The majority of monitoring officers believe that our Quarterly Returns and Annual Returns are working effectively, according to our research.

During the summer, our research team conducted the final part of its review of Standards for England's online monitoring system. This forms part of a programme of work to assess how well the system is working, and was the final part of a review project that started in June 2008.

For this part of the research, the team distributed surveys to a random sample of monitoring officers and officers who are nominated to make an online submission. Some 50 surveys were sent to assess satisfaction levels with the quarterly return, and another 50 for the annual return (this was the first time this return had been used by stakeholders). We had a good response to our survey with about half the questionnaires being returned. We would like to thank all those who participated in the survey.

The survey's results show that the majority of monitoring officers/nominated staff surveyed continue to agree that the quarterly return is working effectively, with respondents encountering minimal or no difficulty in submitting their return. There were plenty of suggestions from respondents on how to further develop the form now that the quarterly return has been operational for over a year.

The annual return survey also showed that stakeholders are pleased with how the annual return form worked during its first run. There were lots of suggestions from respondents on how the form can be enhanced in the future, with certain sections of the form being considered more relevant than others. These suggestions have been passed on to our annual return development team, and will be incorporated into the design of next year's form.

If you have any questions about this review or future reviews of the system, please contact Tom Bandenburg, Research Assistant: 0161 817 5427 or email: tom.bandenburg@standardsforengland.gov.uk.

That's a wrap!

Editing is now underway for our new training DVD on Local Assessment following a successful shoot last month. Viewers will follow the work of Jack Ridley and his fellow assessment sub-committee members as they look at a variety of complaints about councillors covered by their standards committee.

The film is designed to help standards committees and officers who are involved in the assessment of complaints that a member may have breached the Code of Conduct. It will take viewers through the main stages of local assessment, exploring important or contentious issues along the way.

Learning points are interspersed with the drama. Standard DVD extras including scene selection and subtitles will also be available.

Copies of the DVD will be sent to all monitoring officers in October, and we look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Annual Assembly 2009: Bringing standards into focus

There are just a handful of places left for the 2009 Annual Assembly, 'Bringing standards into focus', at the ICC, Birmingham, on 12-13 October 2009.

This year, we've responded to your call for more sessions focused on good practice, and the programme is full of opportunities for you to share the lessons you've learnt about the local standards framework. A great range of speakers are now on board, including standards committee members and officers from authorities across the country, as well as all those shortlisted for the 2009 LGC Standards and Ethics award. Full details of the programme, including confirmed speakers, is available [here](#).

Solicitors attending the Assembly can earn 10.25 bonus credits towards their continuing professional development, as the event is certified to count towards SRA's CPD scheme.

Breakout sessions are filling up fast and if you have secured your place at the conference you are urged to choose your sessions and return your preference form as soon as possible to avoid disappointment.

Changes at the Adjudication Panel for England

In Bulletin [issue 42](#) we wrote about the Adjudication Panel for England's integration into the new unified tribunals' structure.

The Adjudication Panel's work is due to transfer into the new General Regulatory Chamber (GRC) within the First-tier Tribunal in January 2010, subject to Parliamentary approval. The GRC is a new chamber that will bring together individual tribunals that hear appeals on regulatory issues.

From January 2010, proceedings which would previously have been before the Panel's tribunals, and decisions previously made by the President of the Adjudication Panel, will be undertaken in the GRC of the First-tier Tribunal. Appeals from the GRC will be to the Administrative Appeals Chamber of the Upper Tribunal.

These changes are part of a programme of tribunal reform that began with the establishment of the First-tier and Upper Tribunals in November last year. This put in place a new flexible structure where services can be built that are increasingly responsive to the needs of users.

The independent status of the judicial office holders who consider the references and appeals that come to the Adjudication Panel is not affected by the transfer into the unified structure. Tribunal users will continue to receive a specialist service following the changes, as members of the Adjudication Panel will move into the new First-tier Tribunal. They will continue to deal with the references and appeals on matters arising from the operation of the Code.

You can find out more about the merger [here](#).

All postal correspondence, including standards committee referrals and subject member appeals should now be sent to the Adjudication Panel's new address:

Adjudication Panel for England
Tribunal Service
York House
31-36 York Place
Leeds
West Yorkshire
LS1 2ED

Forthcoming events

Standards for England has a packed event calendar for the next few months.

You can visit us on our stands at the following events:

NALC Annual Conference

4-5 September
Royal College of Physicians, London
Stand 4 in the Dorchester Library

Liberal Democrat party conference

19 -23 September 2009
Bournemouth ICC
Stand 36 in the Solent Hall

Labour party conference

27 September - 1 October 2009
Brighton Centre
Stand 92 in the Hewison Hall

Conservative party conference

5 -8 October 2009
Manchester Central
Stand 106

Solace Annual Conference

20 - 22 October
Brighton Centre

Society of Local Council Clerks National Conference

23-25 October

De Vere Hotel, Daventry
Stand 34

AcSeS Annual Conference
18-19 November
The Armouries, Leeds

SfE continues to support LGC award

We are pleased to announce our continued support for the **Standards and Ethics** category at the **2010 LGC Awards**, following the success of last year's award.

The quality of last year's entries showed that many local authorities are strongly committed to promoting high standards of member conduct, and see the vital connection between standards, public trust and success. Good practice ideas from last year's winners are available on our [website](#).

This year, we want to know more about how authority standards committees, members and officers are working together to champion ethical standards and make a positive difference to public trust.

Entries should demonstrate how high standards of conduct are central to the authority's culture and governance. You can enter online at www.lgcawards.co.uk, where you can also find further information on the LGC Awards. The closing date for entries is **13 November 2009**.

If you would like further information on the award, you can also contact Clare Sydney, Standards for England Communications and Events Manager, on 0161 817 5332.

NALC's Local Council Awards 2009

NALC's Local Council Awards 2009 NALC has re-launched its Local Council Awards. NALC is looking for good practice from councils regardless of size or location. This year's NALC Local Council Awards will be in the categories of:

- Council of the Year sponsored by AON
- Clerk of the Year sponsored by AON
- Councillor of the Year sponsored by the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC)
- Council Worker of the Year sponsored by The Co-operative Bank
- Much Improved Council of the Year sponsored by Standards for England

The closing date for applications is 30 November 2009.

For further information about the awards criteria and application details please visit the NALC website or the website of [NALC's](#) flagship publication, [LCR](#).

Updating authority websites

If your authority's website contains contact information for us, please make sure that it is up-to-date.

You are welcome to use our logo as a link to our website. If you would like to do so, please contact Trish Ritchie on 0161 817 5406 or trish.ritchie@standardsforengland.gov.uk who will send one to you.

Here are our current contact details

Address:

Standards for England

Fourth Floor

Griffin House

40 Lever Street

Manchester

M1 1BB

Website: www.standardsforengland.gov.uk

Email: enquiries@standardsforengland.gov.uk

Enquiries line: 0845 078 8181

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