

MEETING:	COUNCIL
DATE:	16 JULY 2010
TITLE OF REPORT:	REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 02 JULY 2010
PORTFOLIO AREA:	LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

CLASSIFICATION: This is an open report.

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

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To note the report and approve any recommendations therein.

Recommendation(s)

THAT: Council approves the Guide to Blogging and Social Networking for members attached at Appendix A to this report.

Vice-Chairman

1. Members appointed David Stevens as Vice-Chairman of the Standards Committee for the ensuing municipal year, in accordance with matters approved at Annual Council on 28 May. The move to appoint a Vice-chairman for the first time in the Committee's history is a response to the Committee's increased level of activity. As well as acting in the Chairman's absence at meetings, David will assist in matters which require the Chairman's input in the absence of the Chairman.

Dispensations

2. We have granted dispensations to seven members of Bridstow Parish Council in relation to Bridstow Village Hall.

Guide to Standards Committee Processes and Framework

3. We agreed a guide to Standards Committee processes in respect of complaints received about councillors in relation to the Code of Conduct. The aim of the guide is to help members of the public better understand the processes and the timescales involved. We will make the guide publicly available, and it will also appear on the Council's website in the next few weeks. Given the proposed changes to the Standards Board Regime announced by the government it was decided not to recommend the inclusion of this guide in the Council's constitution at this time. The Constitutional Review Working Group agreed.

The Future of the Local Government Standards Framework

4. It is clear that changes to Standards for England and the local Standards framework will be effected through the proposed Decentralisation and Localism Bill, due to be published later this year. Standards for England have ceased some of its activities and have cancelled this year's Annual Assembly of Standards Committees in response to the news. To date, we have no further information on any proposals, and the local filter still continues to operate as before. The present message, therefore, is very much "business as usual" until any new measures are introduced by Central Government.

Guide to Blogging and Social Networking

5. We have produced guidance for all local authority, parish and town council members in respect of blogging, social networking and other forms of communication. Standards for England initially issued guidance on its website, and ours essentially mirrors this, with some amendments in accordance with our local procedures, and with additional advice for members who find themselves the subject of adverse comments in other's publications. We feel that the guidance is essential to ensure that members are compliant with the Code of Conduct when using electronic forms of communication, particularly given the rapid and widespread distribution of this medium. The guidance is attached at Appendix A.

Appeal to the First-Tier Tribunal

6. We welcomed the news that the First Tier Tribunal, in an appeal panel on 21 May 2010, upheld the decisions of the Standards Committee Hearing in the case of Councillor Frank Myers of Walford Parish Council. The Tribunal's decision is available in full on its website (case reference APE 0491), via the link:

<http://www.adjudicationpanel.tribunals.gov.uk/Public/Decisions.aspx>

Local Filter Cases and Determinations

7. 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, fifty in 2009, and so far in 2010 it has dealt with eighteen.

Appendices

Appendix A – Guide to Blogging and Social Networking

Background Papers

- Agenda for the Standards Committee Meeting held on 02 July 2010.

**ROBERT ROGERS
CHAIRMAN
STANDARDS COMMITTEE**