

**SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**ANNUAL REVIEW**

**APRIL 2006 TO MARCH 2007**

## **THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Reverend Paul Lipscomb (Chair) )  
Mr Fred Ashmore )  
Mr Mike Field ) Independent Members  
One Vacancy )

Councillor Mohammed Aziz )  
Councillor Sukjhit Dhaliwal )  
Councillor John Finn ) Elected Members  
Councillor Latif khan )  
Councillor Mews Mann )  
Councillor Patricia O'Connor )

Councillor Nicoline Brandlight ) Parish Council Representative

Mr Zahire Khan (Independent Member), Councillors Mohammed Rasib, Lydia Simmons and Parish Representative Laurie Tucker were also Members of the Committee during the Municipal Year but have subsequently retired.

The Committee is serviced by Steven Quayle, Monitoring Officer and June Cook the Member Services Manager.

The Committee meets at least four times a year in public. Committee agenda papers and minutes are available on the Council's website at [www.slough.gov.uk](http://www.slough.gov.uk).

It hardly seems possible that eight years have passed since the Council set up its Ethical Standards Working Party, the precursor of the current Standards Committee. The Committee has come a long way since those early days: from developing and promoting the Council's comprehensive Ethical Framework to hearing and deciding complaints referred to the Monitoring Officer by the Standards Board.

We now look forward to the introduction of new legislation which will allow the Committee to decide which complaints warrant investigation, something which we have campaigned for over many years. This will enable us to be better equipped to play our part in maintaining the highest standards of behaviour within the Council and upholding the requirements of the Local Code of Conduct for Members. Overall we believe that standards have improved with the possible exception of petulant and unseemly behaviour in the Council Chamber and at times a lack of respect for the Office of the Mayor. It will be our task in the immediate future to address these shortcomings while at the same time endeavouring to calm tensions and improve personal relationships between elected Members.

Let all be assured that party political considerations will play no part in our deliberations and whatever we do will be done with fairness and justice as our guiding watchword.

## **What the Standards Board Does**

The Standards Board for England was established by the Local Government Act 2000 to help build confidence in local democracy by:-

- Promoting high standards of Ethical behaviour.
- Overseeing and promoting the Code of Conduct.
- Receiving and investigating complaints and misconduct.
- Provides national guidance to Councillors, local Standards Committee and Council Monitoring Officers.

## **What We Do**

- Promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors, Co-opted Members and Diocesan Representatives.
- Monitor the operation of the Council's Ethical Framework.
- Advise and train Councillors on conduct and interests.
- Hear complaints referred to us by the Standards Board through the Standards (Local Determination) Sub-Committee.
- Give advice and guidance on the Whistle-blowing Policy and Procedure.
- Monitor the performance of Councillors.

## **What Have We Done?**

In 2006/07 we:-

- Required members appointed to quasi-legal bodies to undergo compulsory training before taking any decisions.
- Approved the criteria and process for determining indemnification for a Member or Officer against legal action against them as individuals.
- Worked with the Audit Commission on an Ethical Governance Survey .
- Reviewed the Planning Code of Conduct and Planning Public Participation Scheme.
- Made representations to Government on proposed amendments to the model Code of Conduct for Local Authority Members.
- Approved a revised format for its Annual Report 2006/07.
- Agreed that the Committee should be more actively involved in setting its aims and objectives and work programme.
- Commenced working with Parish Councils on processes and procedures.
- Requested annual reports on gifts and hospitality registered by Members during the preceding municipal year.
- Publicised our work at the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees.

The number of complaints determined by the Sub-Committee has declined over the last two years and the details are set out below:-

<b>Year</b>	<b>Complaints</b>	<b>No Further Action</b>	<b>Referred for Investigations</b>	<b>Breach</b>
2005	20	15	5	5
2006	11	7	4	1

There have been no complaints about the conduct of Parish Councillors.

## **THE FUTURE**

The Standards Board for England has recently moved to Manchester and its role is soon to change to that of a “light touch regulator”. This means that it will take a national strategic view of ethical matters which affect Local Authorities and their Members by providing strategic guidance and assistance. It will still retain an investigatory role but only in those cases which are serious or which relate to a new or unique issue relating to Member behaviour.

This change in emphasis will enable almost all complaints about the conduct of Members to be handled locally from beginning to end. This means that the Standards Committee will decide itself whether a complaint merits investigation. The Committee will set the relevant criteria in accordance with any guidance issued by the Standards Board. Such complaints will be investigated by the Monitoring Officer who will then report to our Sub-Committee.

In summary we will:-

- Review the Whistle-blowing Policy and Procedure and the Employee Code of Conduct.
- Respond to the findings of the Ethical Governance Survey.
- Consider the data gather during 2006/07 under the Member performance monitoring arrangements.
- Provide further learning on the new provisions of the Local Code.
- Develop our work with Parishes.
- Hear any complaints referred to us.
- Draw up an informal reconciliation/mediation process to aid the early resolution of complaints.
- Consider the setting up of our own web page.

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