

**STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND
ANNUAL RETURN 2010
(Report by the Head of Law, Property and Governance
and Monitoring Officer)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In April 2009, Standards for England (SFE) collected annual information returns completed by Monitoring Officers from 438 local authorities covering the period 18th May 2008 to 30th March 2009.
- 1.2 SFE consider that this initiative will help them fulfil their duty to maintain high standards of ethical conduct in their authorities and ensure the effectiveness of local standards arrangements.
- 1.3 This year and whilst the questions of the annual return are currently being developed, SFE has given monitoring officers additional time to prepare their responses and to consult with their Standards Committees on the preparation of the District Council's annual return for 2010.
- 1.4 Members views are requested to assist the Monitoring Officer in response to Part 1 of the annual return and to consider whether, in future, the return should be completed after consultation with the Chairman of the Committee.

2. ANNUAL REPORT

- 2.1 It would appear that last year's annual return showed that 59% of standards committees produced an annual report.
- 2.2 An annual report might contain -
- ◆ a personal statement by the Standards Committee Chairman;
 - ◆ information about members of the Standards Committee;
 - ◆ the role of the Standards Committee;
 - ◆ the Standards Committee terms of reference;
 - ◆ information about the code of conduct;
 - ◆ statistical information about complaints that have been received;
 - ◆ information about the length of time taken to deal with complaints;
 - ◆ a summary of complaints which led to investigation, sanction or other action;
 - ◆ details about training/events provided;
 - ◆ the forward work plan of the Committee.
- 2.3 It is suggested that the annual report might be made available in the following way -
- ◆ sent to all Chief Officers;
 - ◆ sent to all Members;
 - ◆ sent to Parish/Town Councils;

- ◆ made available on the authority's intranet;
- ◆ made available as a specific item on the authority website;
- ◆ made available in the Standards Committee papers published on the authority website;
- ◆ made available in the Standards Committee papers published on the authority website;
- ◆ included as a full authority meeting agenda item;
- ◆ publicised in the local newspaper/press release;
- ◆ distributed to households;
- ◆ made available at the authority offices.

2.3 In previous years, the Committee has produced an annual survey of complaints received by type, locality and outcome and on the training received by Councillors (both District and Parish). A training programme for the following year is then structured to meet any emerging needs or trends. This survey has been undertaken in response to the requirements of the Audit Commission and their "use of resources judgement" under the theme "an assessment of the standards of ethical conduct across the organisation".

2.4 SFE indicate that any response to their annual review would be shared with the Audit Commission to help inform their organisational "use of resources, key line of enquiry" assessment.

3. QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE

3.1 It would seem that SFE are encouraging all authorities to produce an annual report. This could incorporate the survey of complaints undertaken annually by the Monitoring Officer and respond to the requirements of the Audit Commission. As this appears to be the approach taken by a number of authorities, the Monitoring Officer recommends that the Committee's first annual report be prepared for the July 2010 meeting. The Committee is asked to support this course of action. Members views also are invited on what they would wish to see featured in the Annual Report, how it should be circulated and (after July 2010) at what point in the year it should be published.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The views of the Committee are invited.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Letter received from the Standards Board dated 16th February 2010.

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