

STANDARDS UPDATE
(Report by the Head of Law, Property and Governance
and Monitoring Officer)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report informs the Committee of the progress made on various standards issues discussed at the July meeting and referred to in the proposed work programme for 2010/2011.
- 1.2 Since July, the Monitoring Officer has progressed the following -
- ◆ invited nominations to the vacant position of parish council representative;
 - ◆ completed the Annual Report 2009/2010;
 - ◆ prepared frequently answered questions (FAQs) for inclusion on the District Council's web page 'Standards and Conduct';
 - ◆ began to create an online version of the Code of Conduct complaint form; and
 - ◆ considered arrangements for an Autumn training programme.

2. ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010

- 2.1 Members will recall that they approved a draft version of the 2009/2010 Annual Report at their meeting in July subject to the inclusion of additional information in the 'time and cost' section of the report. In accordance with the Committee's instructions, the Annual Report was subsequently published on the District Council's website in August and has been sent to all town and parish councils electronically by way of the quarterly "parish alert". Similarly, the Annual Report has been distributed to all Members of the Council electronically as part of the weekly Members' Bulletin. An article on the Annual Report also will feature in the October edition of District-Wide magazine. A copy is enclosed with the agenda for Members only in compliance with the Committee's request that the document should be produced and circulated in a cost-effective way.

3. WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 At the March meeting of the Committee, the Monitoring Officer undertook to prepare a series of "frequently asked questions" to be made available on the 'Standards and Conduct' pages of the District Council's website. Draft FAQs are now enclosed at Appendix A and the Committee is invited to comment on them.
- 3.2 As part of the development of the web pages, the District Council's web team are now building an on-line form to allow for code of conduct complaints to be completed and submitted on-line. Whilst the forms have been available on this site for some time, those wishing to submit a complaint have been required to download and complete the form in paper copy before forwarding it to the Monitoring Officer by post. It is intended that this work will be completed by the web team in the next few weeks. Members will be pleased to note

that the photograph taken of the Committee at the last meeting is also now featured on the website.

4. SELECTION OF ADDITIONAL PARISH REPRESENTATIVES

- 4.1 It was resolved by the Committee in July to seek a nomination to the vacant parish council representative post directly from town and parish councils. Whilst several expressions of interest already have been received, the enclosed invitation at Appendix B was sent to all town and parish councils recently via the 'parish alert'. The deadline for the submission of expressions of interest is 20th September 2010. Thereafter, the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Monitoring Officer and an existing Parish Council representative have been authorised by the Committee to make the final selection.

5. TRAINING PROGRAMME

- 5.1 Members endorsed the approach to be taken by the Monitoring Officer towards training activity on the code of conduct based on four area based sessions in the Autumn. However, in view of the uncertainty over the future of the standards regime and given the suggestion that the code of conduct requirements may be discontinued by the soon to be published Decentralisation and Localism bill, it is considered imprudent currently to make arrangements for training sessions which will involve the booking of venues for which the District Council would be liable to incur a charge should they subsequently have to be cancelled. Should it transpire that the provisions of the model code of conduct continue to operate, the Monitoring Officer will set up training sessions for town and parish councils as originally agreed.

6. GENERAL

- 6.1 Given the current uncertainty the Monitoring Officer is reluctant to pursue any other development options until it becomes clear what the Government propose for or instead of the ethical standards regime.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The Committee is requested to note this update.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

**Contact Officer: Christine Deller, Democratic Services Manager -
Tel: (01480) 388007.**