

PROPOSED FORWARD PLAN – 2010/2011

The Independent members of the Standards Committee met on 29 July 2010 to discuss a Forward Plan for 2010-2011. Both the Vice Chairman and the Monitoring Officer have been consulted. This proposal is now presented to the Committee for consideration.

The aims of the Forward Plan are to assist the Standards Committee by recording future work plans and matters for consideration; to suggest a target date for completion; and to offer appropriate support and challenge in relation to the promotion of high ethical standards amongst both elected and co-opted members. To provide the Committee with an opportunity to monitor progress, it is proposed that the Forward Plan becomes a standing item on the Committee's Agenda. Members are invited to consider for decision **items highlighted in black** at the Committee meeting on 1 September 2010.

Terms of reference

The new priorities for the coming year need to reflect the economic and regulatory climate in which the Borough Council has to operate. The Forward Plan recommends that the Committee's efforts should be directed towards:

- **promoting and maintaining high standards of ethical governance and conduct** by members by drawing on best practice as identified by national bodies and local standards networks ;
- **operating the local code of conduct complaints system** efficiently and promptly, encouraging the Monitoring Officer to resolve problems informally, for example by mediation, training or apology. When this is not possible, the Committee will seek to find the most economical means of taking the complaint forward and in the shortest possible time;
- **providing training for borough and parish councillors, parish clerks** and members of the Standards Committee relating to the Code of Conduct;
- **supporting MBC** for example by liaising with Audit/Overview and Scrutiny Committees to minimise duplication of effort, by maintaining a dialogue with the Leaders and Chief Officers, and by offering advice on new working relationships for instance on the conduct of councillors involved in local partnerships;
- **disseminating information** to members of the Committee and to borough/parish councillors
- **promoting and publicising standards issues** within MBC and to the community as a whole

MRS D PHILLIPS

CHAIRMAN Maidstone Borough Council Standards Committee

Standards Committee – Forward plan 2010/2011

To promote and maintain good governance in Maidstone

Activity	Action/Progress	Timescale
CODE OF CONDUCT		
To consider the changing requirements of central government	<p>To comment on and thereby influence future government legislation and guidance.</p> <p>Before consultation process is announced:</p> <p>Send letter to the Secretary of State urging effective consultation process, possibly in cooperation with other SCs</p> <p>After consultation process is announced:</p> <p>a)Chairman/MO to prepare draft response for consideration by Committee</p> <p>b)MO to have delegated powers to deal with urgent responses in consultation with Chairman</p>	<p>Comment within time limits set by consultation process keeping members up-to- date at Committee meetings and by e-mail when necessary</p> <p>MO to investigate position in other Kent SCs and, in consultation with the Chairman, write to the Secretary of State in September</p> <p>Decision at September meeting</p>
To liaise with other local standards networks on good practice	Independent Co-opted Members to attend Kent/Medway Independent Standards Committee Liaison Group, work with other local authorities and report back to the Committee	<p>New developments e.g. toolkits to be reported to and discussed by the Committee.</p> <p>MO to report to Committee in December on SfE’s “Working with parishes” protocol and on MBC’s Partnerships protocol</p>
Monitoring the role and effectiveness of the Committee	Monitoring take up and effectiveness of training, monitoring complaints, reviewing practice against national best practice advice	Ongoing

Annual return to Standards for England (or to another national body)	Chairman/MO to prepare in February 2011	Issue Return to SfE (or other body) as required
Chairman's Annual Report	Discussion in Committee in April 2011 Consider wider circulation within MBC	Report to Council in June 2011 Circulate to Parish clerks and add to MBC's website
Forward Plan	Regular monitoring	Add as a standing item to the agenda for Committee meetings
Consider dispensation requests from Parish and Borough councillors	Deal with requests expeditiously when received Urgent requests to be determined by Sub-Committee Promote the use of the pro forma	Ongoing
COMPLAINTS PROCESS	(CODE OF CONDUCT)	
Operate the local complaints process	To carry out the work efficiently, choosing the most effective and economical means to fulfil the Committee's statutory duties	Ongoing
Consideration of complaints and 6-monthly Returns	Monitoring	MO to prepare 6-monthly report to Committee in December 2010
Monitor progress of investigations	MO to agree work plan for each investigation in consultation with Chairman of Sub-Committee taking account of SfE's guidance	Decision at September meeting
TRAINING		
Regular training for Councillors on the Ethical Framework	Ongoing training for Borough and Parish Members	Continue the bi-monthly programme to start 4 October 2010

Training for Members of the Standards Committee on the work of the Assessment Sub-Committees	Training for new Members to include refresher training for existing Members	New Member training as required Refresher training on annual basis
Guidance for MBC officers on how to complain about Members' conduct	Review MBC complaints and grievance advice for MBC officers	Consider at December 2010 meeting MO to provide current guidance given to officers ahead of December meeting
Review and Monitor Training on the Code of Conduct	Identify further training and evaluate feedback from training sessions. Training Officer to set up arrangements to survey all Councillors and Parish Clerks on the effectiveness of their training	Training Officer to report feedback annually to Committee Decision at September meeting
Consider making initial and periodical refresher training mandatory for Borough Councillors	Discussion in Committee	2011-2012
To consider how to integrate Equality Act 2006 and Human Rights Act 1998 into the training	Discussion in Committee	2011-2012
WORKING WITH MBC		
Chairman of Standards Committee to meet the Leader of the Council, political leaders, Chief Executive with Monitoring Officer	To promote and enhance the ethical agenda, raise status of work of the Committee, outline ways by which the Committee can support the Council as part of MBC's accountability to the public	Meet on a six monthly basis Committee to consider topics for discussion at September meeting Chairman to report back to Committee
Chairman of Standards Committee to meet Chairmen of Audit/Overview and Scrutiny Committees	Exchange information to complement and not duplicate effort, and to review arrangements for dealing with complaints	Meet on a six monthly basis Arrange meeting as soon as possible, set timetable for future meetings

Standards for England Partnership Behaviour Protocol	To consider the ethical governance aspects of the partnership arrangements entered into by the Council	MO to report to Committee on MBC protocol for discussion in December 2010
Publication of the Member's Register of Interests, Gifts and Hospitality on Council's web site	Consider public accessibility on website and data protection issues Regular monitoring by Committee	Janet Barnes to report to Committee in December 2010 Discussion in Committee on monitoring procedures in 2011
Appointment of Independent Chairman and Vice Chairman	Independent Chairman and Vice Chairman to be appointed annually	Appointed at first Council after Annual Meeting
Review policy and practice of recruiting Independent and Parish Members	Consider standardising recruitment procedure and length of service of Independent and Parish Members	Chairman to meet KALC to discuss appointment of parish representatives Discussion in Committee in December
Recruitment of 2 Independent members and 1 Parish member at end of 3year term	Advertisements January 2011	Appointment in May 2011
Deputy Monitoring Officer/legal support	Consider ways the new shared legal working arrangements to provide effective support to Committee and can minimise delay in dealing with complaints and investigations	Chairman to raise with Leaders and CEO at meeting in September 2010
Consideration of MBC complaints and 6-monthly Reports	Monitoring	Officers to prepare 6-monthly reports to Committee on regular basis
Undertake an audit of the awareness of ethics and standards amongst officers and Members at the Borough and Parish Councils	Discuss with Audit Committee and Leaders/CEO whether an internal ethical questionnaire would be beneficial given cost	Chairman to raise at meetings with Leaders/CEO and Audit Committee in 2010

Standards Committee Independent and Parish Members encouraged to attend Council meetings	To obtain greater understanding of the workings of the Council	For individual Members to decide according to personal preference and availability
DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION		
Disseminate information, guidance, toolkits to Committee to raise awareness and stimulate discussion of current issues at Committee meetings	Reports to Committee, monitoring and updating website, issuing standards bulletins, introduction of speakers at Committee meetings to stimulate discussion	To be considered at regular intervals at Committee meetings Invite CEO to address Committee in December
RAISING AWARENESS		
Promoting awareness of role and work of the Standards Committee both internally and with the public	Press releases, increased and up-to-date information on website to show importance of standards in public life, integrated with MBC media strategy	Ongoing Develop media strategy to fit in with MBC's media plans