



NORWICH
City Council

ANNUAL REPORT of the CHAIR of STANDARDS – NORWICH CITY COUNCIL

Norwich City Council treats ethical issues seriously. The ethical framework and standards are established and accepted as part of corporate life and the standards committee takes a pro-active role in promoting good conduct.

Sound ethical governance encompasses the processes, procedures, cultures and values which ensure high standards of behaviour.



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Introduction by the Chair

I have great pleasure in presenting the annual report of Norwich City Council's Standards Committee for civic year 2009 – 2010.

This civic year saw the standards committee continuing its role which was newly established in May 2008 when the standards committee became responsible for the initial assessment of complaints that a member may have breached the code of conduct. This function had previously been carried out by Standards for England.

Looking forward to the coming year we aim to expand the role of the committee while working jointly with Standards England by raising the profile of the standards committee to provide a much more pro-active approach to guiding members regarding issues of ethical governance.

We will continue to ensure that standards and ethical conduct remain high in Norwich City Council.

I would like to thank the members of the standards committee for the role they have played when called upon; and on behalf of the committee I thank the officers of the council who have supported the work of the committee.

Peter Franzen – Independent Chair of the Standards Committee of Norwich City Council

Members of the Committee

Both the chair and the vice – chair of the standards committee have to be independent appointees and not council members.

Chair: Peter Franzen

Vice – Chair: Colin Thrower

Councillor Janet Bearman

Councillor Roy Blower

Councillor Deborah Gihawi

Councillor Adrian Holmes

Councillor Jenny Lay

Councillor Judith Lubbock

Background

The government requires every local authority to adopt a code of conduct for members and to appoint a standards committee. There is also a national body called Standards for England and its role provides supervision, support and guidance for local authorities in the performance of their ethical governance functions.

The standards committee has a key role in promoting and maintaining ethical governance and supporting members in following the highest standards of conduct.

Meetings of the committee are usually held in public. However it is sometimes necessary to exclude the press and public from parts of the meeting if reports which are exempt for the purpose of the Local Government Act 1972 need to be discussed.

The standards committee of Norwich City Council is committed to openness and transparency and only excludes the press and public if it is absolutely necessary to do so.

The responsibilities of the standards committee are set out in the council's constitution which is published on the council's web-site www.norwich.gov.uk

Monitoring Officer

The council's monitoring officer, Philip Hyde, together with the officers from legal, democratic and regulatory services support the standards committee in its work.

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The monitoring officer is a statutory role and is responsible for ensuring that the council, its members and officers carry out their functions in a lawful manner.

The Work of the Standards Committee 2009 – 2010

Since May 2008 the standards committee has been responsible for operating a locally based system for initial assessment of complaints that a member may have breached the code of conduct for members.

In operating the locally based system the standards committee has sub – committees, each chaired by one or other of the independent members, that undertake the assessment of allegations that a member has breached the code and to consider any request made by a complainant for a review of a decision to take no further action in respect of an allegation. Also to hold hearings in connection to investigations.

Between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010, none of the council's elected or co – opted members were found to have breached the code of conduct for members by either Standards for England or the council's standards committee.

The council has reported to Standards England on a quarterly basis any activity with regard to the local filter.

At the September meeting of the standards committee, the monitoring officer presented a report regarding a monitoring officer protocol. The protocol formalised existing procedures and was considered best practice. The protocol has since been adopted.

In October 2009 the monitoring officer and the vice – chair of the standards committee attended the two-day annual assembly of Standards England in Birmingham (see separate report).

Issues for 2010 - 2011

We are in the early stages of developing the standards committee's role. There is a move to extend the standards committee's work to not only deal with the standards of conduct of the City's councillors and co-opted members and to help them observe the code of conduct for members, but to actively promote good standards of conduct and ethics. The committee will be encouraged to keep the local codes of practice under review and be involved in arranging training for councillors in how the code of conduct works. This will be achieved alongside the role of considering and determining most complaints regarding elected and co – opted members.

The monitoring officer aims to set up a minimum of 4 standing standards committee meeting dates per year to carry out ethics and governance work. The idea behind these meetings will be to develop and embed the ethos of ethical standards throughout the organisation which would be led by members themselves.

Members of the standards committee also await the delayed arrival of the revised model code of conduct which was originally promised for May 2009 by the government and any action required once it is with us. We have recently been informed that a new code of conduct for members will not be laid during this Parliamentary session. Communities and Local Government have notified us that the government is concentrating on financial instruments and so there will not be Parliamentary time available for the code. This means that a new code will not now be laid until after a general election.

In the meantime, as of 18 January 2010 the work of the Adjudication Panel for England has transferred into the unified tribunal structure under the new General Regulatory Chamber (GRC).

The transfer order has made various amendments to the Local Government Act 2000, the Case Tribunal Regulations and the Standards Committee Regulations to reflect the abolishment of the Adjudication Panel for England. If the tribunal agrees to accept a referral under Regulation 17 of the Standards Committee Regulations, the Standards Committee will need to complete an "Initiating Application" form. This is available on the tribunal website.

There are also changes to decision notices issued by standards committees. Decision notices issued to members following a determination by a standards committee, now need to reflect the amendments to the standards committee regulations on the right to appeal. This is because members now have 28 days in which to seek and appeal. References to the Adjudication Panel for England now have to reflect the name change – first tier tribunal (local government standards England).

To Find Out More

If you would like more information about standards and ethical governance you may find the following web-sites useful

Standards England

www.standardsengland.co.uk

Department for Communities & Local Government

www.dclg.gov.uk

The Adjudication Panel for England

www.adjudicationpanel.tribunals.gov.uk

National Association of Local Councils

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Norwich City Council

www.norwich.gov.uk

The Scrutiny Officer – Norwich City Council

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