



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 2011 - 2012. 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.

During the year we saw the passing through parliament of the Localism Bill which has now been enacted. Standards for England is disbanded and the local standards framework that is required to be set up due to the Localism Act is in the process of being considered, including consultation with the monitoring officers of Norfolk and the council's standards committee. Agreement and adoption is anticipated to take place at the council meeting of 19 June 2012. The current arrangements for the standards committee will remain until the necessary changes are in place as a result of the adoption of a new frame-work. Any new arrangements will be made in compliance with the legislation. In the meantime, the standards committee will continue to ensure that standards and ethical conduct remain high in Norwich city council and into the future under the new arrangements.

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 for the year up to April 2012**

Under the current arrangements, 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 Gihawi
Councillor Grenville
Councillor Lay
Councillor Holmes
Councillor Lubbock
Councillor Makoff

Background

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 democratic services support the standards committee in its work. In October 2010 the Council's lawyers services joined forces with Norfolk County Council and Great Yarmouth Borough Council legal staff to form Nplaw (Norfolk Public Law). The legal team from South Norfolk Council has now also joined the partnership. The council formally recognised the relationship between Nplaw and the work of the standards committee by appointing David Johnson, Chris Skinner and Victoria McNeil of Nplaw as deputy monitoring officers under secondment arrangements.

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 2011 - 2012

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 2011 and 31 March 2012, none of the council's elected or co – opted members was found to have breached the code of conduct for members. One case was brought to standards via a standards assessment sub – committee which called for an investigation. However a standards (consideration & hearing) sub-committee considered that there had not been a breach of the member code of conduct.

This year the standards committee considered updates from the monitoring officer and the scrutiny officer with regard to the future of and possible role for the standards committee. There has been discussion of the government's proposals and the new legislation and the standards committee have been in agreement with officers that a local regime be developed on a similar basis to the statutory system currently in operation. As part of this the standards committee recommended to the council that it moves to a local code of conduct based on the seven Nolan principles. The standards committee's view has also been taken account of in the report on the new standards regime that is being taken at the 19 June meeting of the council.

Under the new regime the former sanctions (which included suspension of a member etc.) will no longer be available and lesser sanctions such as censure will apply. However, there would be a new criminal offence created relating to failure to register or declare interests.

The standards committee also kept a watching brief on the wider governance issues arising from the Localism Act and received a report based on the one that was considered by the council's constitution working party that covered:

- The transfer and delegation of functions
- Pay and accountability
- Council tax and
- Community engagement

For more information, please contact:

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