

# LONDON BOROUGH OF BROMLEY

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

### ANNUAL REPORT 2010/11

#### Role and membership of the Committee

1. The Standards Committee is the Council body responsible for promoting high standards of conduct by Councillors, hearing cases of complaint against councillors and promoting and maintaining high standards of ethical governance within the Council.
2. We take a proactive and partnership approach to Standards, working with the Leader, Chief Executive, councillors and officers. We see ourselves as more of a guide dog than a watchdog.
3. The membership of the Committee was as follows:

#### Independent Members

Dr Simon Davey (Chairman) (to 2012)  
Mr Jonathan Prince (Vice-Chairman) (to 2012)  
Mr Richard Allen (to 2014)  
Mr Nicholas Marcar (to 2013)  
Mr George Kidd (resigned Nov 2011)

#### Councillors

Peter Dean  
Peter Fookes  
Alexa Michael  
Tom Papworth  
Stephen Wells

I would like to record the Committee's thanks to George Kidd for his contribution to the Committee and welcome Mr Allen as our newest independent member.

4. During the year the Committee held meetings on June 7th 2010 and January 19th 2011. We received no public questions at these meetings.

#### Hearing complaints

5. Complaints about Bromley councillors' compliance with the national Code of Conduct are considered by us in the first instance. We make information on this process available both in hard copy and through the Council's website. We decide if the complaint is, first of all, worthy of investigation and then whether there has been a breach of the Code. Ultimately we can hold a hearing and, if necessary, apply a penalty or refer the issue for national resolution in especially serious cases.
6. Over the year, six formal complaints were received, involving nine councillors. These were filtered by Initial Assessment Sub-Committees of the Standards Committee. In all cases the Initial Assessment Sub-Committee decided to take no further action and all these were held within the 20 day national target timescale.

7. We have received relatively few complaints that have required local filtering; we believe that this is a positive situation, and we do not wish to have to exercise this power more than we need to. As such, we look to our councillors to maintain their excellent record of responsible behaviour.

## **Other work**

8. This year the Standards Committee's work programme was affected by the new government's announcements that they would be abolishing the existing Standards regime. Publication of the Localism Bill, which contains proposed legislative changes affecting this area, was delayed until mid-December, and even now a number of issues regarding future frameworks are unresolved whilst the Bill is proceeding through both Houses. However, when the Committee discussed the local implications of the Bill at its meeting in January, I was pleased to note that there was a strong commitment from the Leader, Chief Executive and my councillor and independent colleagues to retaining some form of lead body on ethical issues. The existence of such a role would contribute to reassuring local residents that this Council remains committed to open, transparent and fair decision-making processes, which are kept under appropriate scrutiny and review, and also to self-regulation of councillor behaviour when they are acting in an official capacity. I was also pleased that once again the Committee had the opportunity to contribute towards the Corporate Code of Governance submitted to this Council, and that the Council's external auditors, PwC had remarked favourably in the Use of Resources Audit report received earlier in the year, on the positive impact that the Standard's Committee has on wider governance arrangements.
9. This Committee has continued to have discussions with leading councillors (the Leader, and the Leader of the Labour Group) and officers (the Chief Executive, the Council's Chief Planner, the Assistant Director (Audit and Technical) and the Assistant Chief Executive responsible for Human Resources). These discussions happen both at Committee meetings and in small groups or one to ones (e.g. Chairman with Leader or Chief Executive) outside the meetings.
10. We played an active role in new councillor induction in May 2010, ensuring that potential candidates had their attention drawn to the obligations placed on them by the Code of Conduct before they stood; and that, once elected, they were aware of the role the Standards Committee plays in working with them to reinforce positive behaviour at all levels across the Council, and where they can seek guidance if they felt it would be useful. In addition to a general session there were specific practical sessions covering areas such as Development Control where ethical dilemmas can easily arise. The Committee was encouraged to see the personal interest, lead and commitment demonstrated by senior figures on ethical issues, and is committed to supporting them in further promotion and development of the ethical governance agenda going forward.
11. Over the past 12 months we have monitored the operation of the Council as a whole against a variety of ethical governance indicators, including Audit

Commission public interest reports, objections to the Council's accounts on ethical grounds, whistle-blowing issues, employment issues and complaints. We were pleased to note that these showed a relatively small number of issues raised, and no major ethical issues arising from them that required further investigation by the Committee.

### **Future work**

12. Much of the focus for next year's work will inevitably be on what arrangements will need to be put into place locally once the Localism Bill passes into law. In the meantime, the Committee is geared up to continuing to tackle the practical challenges of handling local complaints filtering and hearings. The Committee hopes to continue its record of undertaking any deliberations within the 20 day recommended timescales, and to ensure that both parties receive full and prompt notifications of decisions taken.
13. Finally, I would like to thank my colleague independent Members and Councillors who served on the Standards Committee in 2010/11, consolidating the changes in the standards regime introduced during the previous years, and starting to contribute to thinking on how we might develop a new ethical governance approach in line with changed legislation and the needs of Bromley. I look forward to working with them, and you, in 2011/12 in taking forward the next stages of work on these critical issues.

Simon Davey,  
Chairman, Standards Committee 2010/11  
March 2011