

<i>COMMITTEE</i>	STANDARDS COMMITTEE
<i>DATE</i>	THURSDAY, 29 JULY 2004
<i>TITLE OF REPORT</i>	UPDATE ON STANDARDS ISSUES
<i>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER</i>	Mark Bowen, assistant director, legal and contract services

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update members on developments relating to the work of the committee.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the chairman report back on the work of the Kent and Medway Independent Members' Forum.
- 2.2 Members give their views on training options to support investigation and hearing of complaints.
- 2.3 Members agree proposals for attendance at the third annual assembly of standards committees
- 2.4 Members provide views on adding a review of whistle blowing polices to the work of the committee

3 DECISION ISSUES

- 3.1 The constitution gives the Standards Committee a key role in ensuring good practice across the authority.

4 KENT AND MEDWAY INDEPENDENT MEMBERS OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE

- 4.1 As has been previously advised, the chair of this committee is the secretary to the above group. The last meeting of the group was on 22 June and the chair will update the committee at this meeting.

5 TRAINING FOR LOCAL COMPLAINTS HANDLING

- 5.1 It is anticipated that the regime for local handling of complaints will be finalised in time for the Standards Board for England Conference in September This means that within the next 3 to 6 months, local authorities will be empowered both to deal with the referrals from Ethical Standards

Officers and to hear complaints which have been referred for local determination by the Standards Board for England.

- 5.2 As has been previously advised, a balance needs to be struck between providing training too early – when benefits may be lost by the time any hearings are undertaken against delaying it for too long and not having time to put in place any training before the first hearing.
- 5.3 There is provision in the Medway Members Training Programme for training of this nature during the current year. However, external training providers are limited and relatively expensive. A “flyer” for one of the more modestly priced sessions is appended to the report. Steps to share training with other authorities have so far not proven successful.
- 5.4 At present, the Monitoring Officer is not aware of any matters which may either be referred to members by an Ethical Standards Officer or of any complaints which will be referred for local determination following completion of the framework for local referrals. In the event that anything is referred in advance of the organisation of formal external training then the Monitoring Officer can provide direct training to members of the committee at short notice. This can be piloted at the September meeting.

6 THE THIRD ANNUAL ASSEMBLY FOR STANDARDS COMMITTEES

- 6.1 As has previously been advised the third annual assembly for standards committees organised by the Standards Board for England is to be held over two days on 13 and 14 September 2004 at the ICC in Birmingham. A copy of the agenda has previously been circulated. The fee for the assembly is £380. Attendance on one day for the sum of £210 is an option for this year’s assembly. However, given the need to travel to Birmingham, this is unlikely to lead to any major saving. As members were previously advised, the council’s budget savings for this financial year have limited funding for events of this nature.
- 6.2 The assembly is the key learning and development event for issues relating to the code of conduct and probity issues. As such, if the council’s Monitoring Officer cannot secure a free place due to work done on the Standards Board for England Reference Group then, his attendance will be funded through savings elsewhere in the legal services budget.
- 6.3 Views are requested from members on options for attendance at this year’s conference given the importance ensuring members are sufficiently trained on key probity and standards issues to maximise their role at Medway.

7 FUTURE WORK ISSUES

- 7.1 Through working on various groups with independent members, the chair has become aware that Standards Committees elsewhere in the region undertake work over and above matters relating to the code of conduct. One work

pattern relates to the Standards Committee being charged with reviewing and monitoring a local authority's whistle-blowing policy. Members' views are requested on whether they would wish to add this to the work of the committee.

8 LEGAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.
- 8.2 There is provision in this year's Members Training Budget for training to be provided on investigating and hearing of complaints under the code of conduct. There is not any specific financial provision for attendance at the annual assembly of standards committees.