

**ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**Annual Report**  
**2008/09**

## **1. Roles and Functions**

The Standards Committee has the following roles and functions:

- a) promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives
- b) assisting the councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives to observe the Members' Code of Conduct
- c) advising the Council on the adoption of revisions of the Members' Code of Conduct
- d) monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct
- e) advising, training or arranging to train councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct
- f) granting dispensations to councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives from requirements relating to interests set out in the Members' Code of Conduct
- g) dealing with any reports from a case tribunal or interim case tribunal, and any report from the Monitoring Officer on any matter which is referred by an ethical standards officer to the Monitoring Officer
- h) receiving and assessing complaints about Members in relation to the Code of Conduct
- i) as and when requested by complainants to review decisions to not refer a complaint for investigation following the assessment process referred to in paragraph h)
- j) conducting hearings of complaints about the behaviour of Members following an investigation
- k) acting as Standards Committee for the Essex Fire Authority for the purpose of its Statutory functions

## **2. Membership**

2.1 The Standards Committee is made up of six elected County Councillors and five Independent Members appointed by the Full Council.

2.2 The current Independent Members are:

**Martin Atkinson** (Chairman) - Martin's career has been in Higher Education, and having recently retired, he is now Emeritus Professor of Linguistics at the University of Essex.

**Tony French** (Vice-Chairman) - Tony held senior finance positions in Industry, and since his retirement has worked in the voluntary sector.

**Michael Goodswen** - Michael's experience in Banking includes Trade Union Negotiations. He is now an Independent Member of Essex Police Authority Standards Committee and The Eastern Region Police Misconduct Panel.

**Daniel Farrow** – Daniel is a qualified Chartered Management Accountant with several years experience in banking and commerce. Formerly Daniel was Chief Financial Officer of Maldex PLC and more recently was Chief Executive of the TIS Group.

**Christopher Jackman** - Chris has recently retired from a local government career working in London and Essex as a Housing Manager.

2.2.1 The position of Independent Member is open to anyone who can demonstrate that they have personal integrity, commitment to equal opportunities, the capacity to be fair and independent and the ability to take an objective view, analyse and solve complex problems and exercise sound judgement. Independent Members are recruited following advertisement in local newspapers and a selection process.

2.3 The elected members of the Standards Committee are

Mike Mackrory  
Paul Kirkman  
Elwyn Bishop  
Mavis Webster  
Margaret Fisher  
Jo Pike

2.4 In addition the Chairman of the Council is an ex-officio member of the committee.

### **3. Work of the Committee**

3.1 This year has been the first year for the enlarged Standards Committee that has been recruited and convened to meet the requirements of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

3.2 During the course of the year, the Committee

- has engaged with training in order to meet their new responsibilities and has used the material provided by the Standards Board for England in this context. The training provided a useful opportunity for the new members to work together for the first time and it constituted a helpful grounding for dealing with complaints work when it was received
- has taken the opportunity to revisit and review its terms of reference. It has also established procedures for the setting up of the Sub-committees required to deal with complaints, along with terms of reference for these latter. It is acknowledged that there may be work ahead in fine-tuning aspects of these issues in the light of experience
- has continued to familiarise itself with the information provided by the Standards Board for England, including case studies that are presented as of particular interest
- has been represented at the annual conference of the Standards Board and has received reports from attendees
- responded in detail to the consultation on changes to the Code of Conduct conducted by the Department for Communities and Local Government
- agreed that it would become a joint committee with the Fire Authority and will be joined by members of the latter in the future
- assessed one complaint which required no further action
- contributed to the programme of training for newly elected Members

### **4. Future work programme**

4.1 The Committee is devising a forward plan of work in order to programme tasks for the forthcoming year. Some of the items to be included are:

- The Committee will be working on further plans to integrate their work as a joint committee with the Fire Authority

- There will be opportunities to participate in the induction and training of new members of the council after the election in June
- Benchmarking its activities with those of similar committees in other authorities will be explored
- Opportunities to promulgate and publicise guidance and case reports published by the Standards Board for England will be explored
- The Committee will include in its work the review of key documents that contribute to the ethical framework
- Further training concerning determination for any complaint that is referred for investigation

## **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1 The challenge of developing an effective joint committee will be a significant focus for the forthcoming year together with continuing to acquire expertise in dealing with such complaints as may be made against members under the local determination regime.