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**ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL AND  
ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY JOINT  
STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**Annual Report  
2009/10**

## **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 not to 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 twelve elected members who represent the County Council and the Fire Authority and five Independent Members appointed by the Full Council.

- 2.2 The current Independent Members are:

### **Essex County Council Appointed Independent Members**

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

**Tony French** (Vice-Chairman) - Tony held a senior finance position in industry and since his retirement has worked in the voluntary sector. He is also an Independent Member of the Essex Police Authority Standards Committee.

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

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

### **Essex Fire Authority Appointed Independent Member**

**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.

- 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 Councillors Fisher, Mackrory, Pike, Pond, Robinson, Twitchen, Walters, and Mavis Webster together with Councillors McPherson, Pearson and White who represent the Fire Authority.
- 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 that the Committee has acted as the joint committee for Essex County Council and the Fire Authority.
- 3.2 During the course of the year, the Committee
- has participated in the training offered to new members after the elections of 2009. This has included two sessions offering information about the Code of Conduct for members, the role of the Standards Committee and the role of the Independent Member. The sessions provided an opportunity for debate as well as for the dissemination of information in relation to these topics.
  - has developed the procedures necessary for the conduct of hearings. It has taken the opportunity to refine policies for the assessment of complaints. In undertaking this work it has utilised and built upon the experience of assessing complaints over the year.
  - has continued to familiarise itself with the information provided by Standards for England, including case studies that are presented as of particular interest
  - has been represented at the annual conference of Standards for England and has received reports from attendees
  - has put in place the mechanism to replace existing independent members who will be retiring in the forthcoming year.
- 3.3 During the past year the Committee has received seven complaints. Of those three were referred to Standards for England, two were assessed as not being appropriate for investigation, one was referred for investigation locally and one was assessed as inappropriate for investigation but is currently under review. The case that was referred for investigation locally was determined as not providing a case to answer. Standards for England are dealing with two cases currently and the third case was determined as disclosing a breach of the code for which no further action was appropriate.
- 3.4 In dealing with complaints, the Standards Committee is mindful of lessons that might be learned or shared with other Members as part of their activities. The issues that have arisen over the past year have not given rise to any specific learning points but matters that have been considered as part of the assessment process have been shared with other members of the Standards Committee and have contributed to the preparation of policies that will be applied to future assessments. Anonymity will be given to Members regarding their individual cases if they are used as part of any learning. As indicated in paragraph 4 of this report it is proposed to create a manual which will assist in the process in the future and this will incorporate learning points as they arise.

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

- 4.1 The Committee has a forward plan of work in order to programme tasks for the forthcoming year. This document assists in identifying work that needs to be undertaken as well as in programming routine items of business.
- 4.2 Some of the items to be included are:

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- promulgation and publicity for the guidance and case reports published by Standards for England will be explored
  - review of key documents that contribute to the ethical framework
  - training on determination for any complaint that is referred for investigation
  - review and improvement of the web presence for the Committee
  - discussion and actions upon the results of the Ethical Governance Survey
  - addressing the training needs of Members and of Committee Members in relation to standards issues and the ethical framework
  - preparation of a manual to assist Members of the Standards Committee in dealing with complaints to include decided cases, policies and agreed procedures.
  - Induction of newly appointed independent members of the Committee.
5. The year has seen the retirement of the Chairman, Professor Martin Atkinson, as his term of office and appointment as an independent member has expired. The Committee took the opportunity at his last meeting to thank him for the contribution that he has made as the first chairman of the Standards Committee and to pay tribute to his leadership during his term of office.