

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

Annual Report

2010/11

1. Roles and Functions

The Standards Committee has the following roles and functions:

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- 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
 - l) consideration of requests from Officers for removal of political restrictions from their post
 - m). to act as an appeal committee for Members –
 - with a physical disability claiming specific travel expenses, outside the normal provisions of the Member Allowances Scheme;
 - with carer responsibilities claiming the cost of a Carer whilst the Member is on approved Council duties
 - n) consideration of annual statements to be produced by Members highlighting their achievements and activities.

2. Membership

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- 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 County Council and the Fire Authority.
 - 2.2 The current Independent Members are:

Essex County Council Appointed Independent Members

Tony French (Chairman) - Tony is a qualified accountant who held senior finance positions 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 (Vice-Chairman) – 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.

Colin Booth – Colin is a Trainer and operational technical rescue responder for the London Fire Brigade. Formerly he was a Chairman of the School Governors for Moulsham Junior School. He monitors standards in both his working life and as a School Governor.

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, Hart, Mackrory, Pike, Pond, Robinson, Twitchen, and Mavis Webster together with Councillors McPherson, Pearson and Evans 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 During the course of the year, the Committee
 - as part of the Ethical Governance Diagnostic, Members of the Committee attended focus groups and interviews to discuss governance issues in general. The Audit Commission findings report was discussed at a

meeting in January 2011. It is important that the Committee is kept abreast of developments relating to Governance within the Council. .

- has been involved in developing a procedure for the Members Allowance Scheme and has been kept informed of its progress.
- has revised the Standards Members' Handbook.
- has participated in the training offered in November 2010 for sessions on the Code of Conduct for Members, the role of the Standards Committee and the role of the Independent Member.

3.2 During the past year the Committee has received four complaints. Of those complaints, two were assessed as not being appropriate for investigation, one was referred for investigation locally and one was referred to a District Council.

3.3 A complaint which the Committee assessed the previous year was Reviewed following an appeal and further information supplied by the complainant. The Review Sub-Committee concluded that no action should be taken and that the decision taken by the Assessment Sub-Committee should stand as there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the Code of Conduct had been breached. (The complainant has referred the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman for investigation of the process.)

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. Anonymity will be given to Members regarding their individual cases if they are used as part of any learning.

4. Future work programme

- 4.1 Looking at the future of the Committee has been difficult during the past year with the impending demise of Standards for England and the Government's intention to remove the requirement to have a Code of Conduct for Members and the need for a standards committee. At this time, there is no specific timetable for the implementation of the Government's intentions, but in the meantime the Committee must continue to carry out its statutory duties.

The Standards Committee looks forward to working with the Council and the Fire Authority in understanding what their requirements will be for the future and what benefit the Committee might bring to any voluntary arrangements.