

# STANDARDS COMMITTEE OF THE LONDON BOROUGH OF ISLINGTON

## FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT – OCTOBER 2007

### INTRODUCTION

I have great pleasure in presenting our fifth annual report to the Council on the work of the Committee. It sets out the key issues we have dealt with during the past year.

### THE COMMITTEE

The Standards Committee for 2006/07 comprised 5 members as follows:

#### Three Independent Members

Father Jim Kennedy, Chair

Jo Michie (Resigned 7th February 2007, and replaced by Diana Gibbs from June 2007)

Eric Sorensen

#### Two Councillors

Councillor Terry Stacy, JP

Councillor Richard Watts

#### Two Independent Co-opted Advisory Members

Manjit Kumar

Kit Peverley

The Committee was supported by Louise Round, Director of Corporate Resources and Monitoring Officer and John Lynch, Head of Democratic Services.

### TERMS OF REFERENCE

The role and purpose of the Committee is as follows:

- (a) To advise the Council on a local Code of Conduct for members and to promote, develop and maintain high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members of the Council;
- (b) To monitor and update the Code of Conduct as necessary;
- (c) To be responsible for the implementation of the Code of Conduct and for providing or organising training for members on ethical conduct;
- (d) To consider any report from the Monitoring Officer on any matter which is referred to her by an Ethical Standards Officer of the Standards Board for England under Sections 60 or 64 of the Local Government Act 2000.

- (e) To consider and respond to national reviews and consultations on standards related issues.
- (f) To grant dispensations to Councillors and co-opted members allowing them to vote in circumstances when they would not otherwise be entitled to.

## **REVIEW OF THE MAIN ISSUES ADDRESSED IN 2006/07**

### **Consultation on amendments to the Model Code of Conduct for Members.**

In February we responded to the Government's consultation paper on the suggested detailed amendments to the Model Code they proposed. A number of changes were proposed to both personal and prejudicial interests as well as new requirements added in relation to equalities, bullying and disclosure of confidential information. The new Code was published on the 4th April 2007 and formally adopted by the full Council at their meeting on the 26th June 2007.

Briefing sessions on the new Code have been organised by the Monitoring Officer for all Members and officers.

### **Register Of Members' Financial And Other Interests**

We considered a report asking for our views as to whether the Register of Members' Financial and Other Interests should be placed on the Council's website for public inspection.

The current procedure was that Members were able to fill in the register on-line on the Council's intranet system. Members of the public who wished to view the register could do so by contacting officers to make an appointment for them to view the register in the Town Hall.

Although it was not a legal requirement to make this information available electronically, it would help make the information more available to the public at any time and also allow for greater transparency.

We agreed that the information should be made available on line despite some of the possible problems of doing so.

We also agreed before the new Code of Conduct came into effect a procedure for dealing with sensitive information in the register. If a Member is of the view that the inclusion of information in the publicly available register is likely to create a serious risk that a member or a person who lives with them may be subjected to violence or intimidation and the Monitoring Officer agrees, then it may not be included on the register but still needs to be submitted to the Monitoring Officer.

### **Visits To Area Committees**

I visited each of the four Area Committees to present last year's Annual Report and to promote the work of the Council. I was somewhat surprised at the behaviour of some of the public at those meetings.

There is a real need to explain to the public what Councillors do, what they are responsible for, how they got elected and the role of political parties. To this end we ensured that the Islington Now Magazine carried a double page editorial in the October edition which focussed on 3 backbench councillors, one from each of the political parties to explain their roles. We hope to have a similar editorial early in the new year focussing on this Committee and its work.

## **New Members**

Jo Michie resigned from the Committee at the beginning of the year and I would like to thank Jo for all her work on the Committee. Her place has now been taken by Diana Gibbs who was appointed at Council on 26th June 2007.

Diana is Director of a Clerkenwell based company KD Partnership Ltd. She is an active member and past president of the Chamber of Commerce and until recently served on the Business Jobs and Training Group for Neighbourhood Renewal.

The Council at their meeting in June also agreed to increase the number of Independent Members on the Committee from three to four. This is to give a greater pool of independent members to choose from when the Committee have to set up both a pre-hearing panel and a sub-committee in which to deal with determinations and Committees to hear any local investigation of cases. If the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill receives Royal Assent in October 2007, it is likely that these new provisions will take effect from April 2008.

I welcome Godfrey Stadlen to the position of our fourth independent member. Godfrey is a retired civil servant who has worked in the Home Office for 31 years and has experience of governance and propriety issues in a number of contexts.

## **Members Training And Development**

We have agreed a training and development programme for 2007/08 for Members which has been based on feedback from last years programme, discussions with the Whips of both Groups and feedback from the Annual Members' Survey.

The programme is broken down into a number of areas: specific skills training, knowledge based events and 1:1 and Group Support via the IDeA and others.

We are keen to see that all Councillors have access to the right training and development to help them carry out their various roles and responsibilities.

## **Local Democracy Week**

The following activities had been arranged for Democracy Week 2007 which runs from 15th to 19th October 2007 and we fully support all those activities that help raise the profile of democracy in the community, especially amongst the young.

Monday 15th - Black History Month 'Great Speech Debate'  
- Islington Today Council Debate - Celebrating Arts and Culture in the Borough

Wednesday 17th- Pupil Parliament 'Healthy Schools Debate' including ballot for best speech

Friday 19th - Open Day at the Town Hall  
Conducted tours of the building outlining its history and a chance to meet some Councillors.

## Reports

We continue to monitor the ethical health of the Council via our quarterly reports on Standards and Ethics Indicators across a number of areas.

We have also received a number of interesting and useful reports over the last year on the following:

- Council's Compliance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- Annual Audit and Inspection Letter
- Internal Audit Plan
- Procedure for Local Standards Hearings

Next year we hope to review the disciplinary and whistleblowing procedures, report on the new investigatory framework and produce some elections advice for members and the community leading up to the GLA Elections in May 2008.

Finally we hope to again carry out the Audit Commission's Ethical Governance Survey on Members and Officers early next year to see if they have understood the changes to the Code of Conduct and are aware of the work of this Committee.

## Conclusion

I am grateful as ever to both Members and officers for the help and support and constructive discussions we have had over the last year.

We do need to make sure all Members are up to speed with the changes to the Code of Conduct and continue to publicise and raise the profile of the work of the Committee.

We have had no cases referred to us to investigate or hear by the Standards Board this year. The changes to allow local Standards Committees to take on a greater role in filtering and investigation of complaints rather than them being submitted direct to the Standards Board is likely to come into effect in 2008 and we need to be sure we have all our processes and procedures in place for these changes.

I will be visiting all Area Committees on the following dates in 2008:

East	-	25/3
North	-	10/1
South	-	7/1
West	-	11/3

to introduce our annual report and I and my colleagues will also be attending a selection of Council and Committee meetings in 2008 to see for ourselves how these are run and how members conduct themselves.

**Father Jim Kennedy**  
**Chair of the Islington Standards Committee**