

Standards Committee Communications Strategy

Objectives

- to report independently to residents and stakeholders on the standards of public life in Islington
- to reassure people that any complaint they made would be dealt with independently, fairly and openly
- to provide information about the standards of public life in Islington, how they are set and monitored.

Key messages

- standards of public life in Islington are high
- the standards committee is an independent advisory committee for the council which helps maintain and monitor the standards of public life in Islington

Key information

- the role of the standards committee
- membership of the standards committee
- how the standards committee works
- what the standards committee does not deal with
- how to contact the committee/make a complaint about standards
- the national Standards Board

Audiences

Residents and other stakeholders in the borough

Members

Council staff

External bodies – such as audit, inspectors, GOL etc.

Local media

National and professional media (potentially, over specific issues)

Potential vehicles for publicity

To outline the work of the committee, the membership etc.

- press release
- website page
- councilwide
- residents newsletter

To provide specific information about the committee, processes for complaints etc.

- factsheet
- leaflet

To provide an additional opportunity to report back on the work of the committee

- standards committee annual report

Rather than be a separate publication, this annual report to be included in existing council publications such as the council tax leaflet or the residents newsletter and on the website.

Timescale

The concept of standards committees is still fairly new and it is not yet completely clear how far the scope of their responsibilities extends. For example, whether they have, or want to have, the scope and authority to deal with individual local cases.

A timescale for the vehicles above will be added as soon as these key decisions have been made.

Appendix 1

Protocol for dealing with press enquiries - Standards Committee

1. Council policy background - refer enquiries to the council's press office

It is the council's policy that media enquiries are dealt with centrally by the council's communications department. Any enquiries received by committee members about their work as members of the committee should be referred to the communications department.

Remember, anything you say can be quoted and nothing should be said that could be interpreted as prejudicing an investigation. The committee chair is the official spokesperson. Journalists should declare themselves at the beginning of a conversation, but may not always do so and committee members should be wary of anyone asking questions without explaining why they are asking them.

Establishing a deadline (last possible moment) is important and it is also important to say that "we" will get back to them before a deadline.

"No comment" is not an option.

The first point of contact should be Rob Storey, external communications manager. However a list of press office contacts is given at the end of this protocol and any of these can deal with the enquiry.

2. If a journalist contacts you

If you are contacted by a journalist, please let people know. You can:

- explain that all media enquiries are dealt with by the council's press office and it is not appropriate for you to comment on individual cases. Refer them to the council's press office or give out of hours numbers

or

- take their name, publication, telephone number and brief details of their enquiry. Ask them what their deadline is. Explain that a council press officer will contact them as soon as possible, reassure them that they will get a response before their deadline. Contact the press office to give them the enquiry if you can.
- contact the chair of the committee directly

3. What happens next

The standards committee is, and must be seen to be, a robust independent committee. The chair of the committee will therefore agree a response, in liaison with the press officer and the director of law. This will be circulated for information to members of the committee.

In the majority of cases it is likely that the statement will be extremely brief and general. It would be inappropriate to comment on individuals, individual cases etc. We will always explain to the journalist why this is the case.

4. Committee spokesperson

If the media enquiry requires a quote response, this will be in the name of the chair of the committee.

5. Your communications contacts

Rob Storey	external communications manager
Charles Dean	communications officer
Nicola Quinn	communications officer
Kate Roe	assistant director

24/7

Out of hours journalists can contact the press office through the switchboard number 020 7527 2000. The switchboard also has press office home numbers.