

# STANDARDS COMMITTEE OF THE LONDON BOROUGH OF ISLINGTON

## EIGHTH ANNUAL REPORT – OCTOBER 2010

### INTRODUCTION

I have great pleasure in presenting our eighth 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 2009/10 comprised 7 members as follows:

#### Five Independent Members

Father Jim Kennedy, Chair  
Diana Gibbs  
Jane McNeill  
Godfrey Stadlen  
Alison Vydulinska

#### Two Councillors

Councillor Phil Kelly  
Councillor George Allan

#### Substitutes

Councillor Richard Watts  
Councillor Paula Belford

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

### TERMS OF REFERENCE

The role and purpose of the Committee is as follows:

1. 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;
2. To monitor and update the Code of Conduct as necessary;
3. To be responsible for the implementation of the Code of Conduct and for providing or organising training for members on ethical conduct;
4. To undertake an initial assessment of any written allegation made to it under section 57A or referred to it under section 58, of the Local Government Act 2000

and upon request under section 57B of that Act to carry out a review of that initial assessment;

5. To appoint from its own membership Sub-Committees to carry out such of its functions under 4 above as it deems necessary;
6. To consider any report from the Monitoring Officer on any matter which is referred to him/her by an Ethical Standards Officer of the Standards Board for England under sections 60 or 64 of the Local Government Act 2000 or which has been investigated following an initial assessment or review under 4;
7. To consider and respond to national reviews and consultations on standards related issues;
8. To grant dispensations to councillors and co-opted members allowing them to vote in circumstances when they would not otherwise be entitled to; and
9. To grant exemptions under section 3 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 from political restriction to holders of posts under the Council and to give directions as to inclusion of specified posts in the list maintained by the Council under section 2(2) of that Act.
10. To publicise and explain the requirements the Code of Conduct places on members to the public, partners and external stakeholders.

## **REVIEW OF THE MAIN ISSUES ADDRESSED IN 2009/10**

### **Local Assessment and Investigation and Hearing Review Procedures**

The Committee became responsible for local assessment of complaints under the Members Code of Conduct in May 2008 and agreed new procedures to cover this responsibility. Although the procedure had only been used 4 times last year, the Committee took the opportunity to review and update the procedures in the light of this experience.

The revised procedures made it clear that the Initial Assessment and Review Sub-Committees meet in closed session; the time periods built into the process were made more flexible so that an appropriate period could be set within a band to suit the size and complexity of evidence in a particular case.

The last change was the incorporation of flowcharts into the procedures as this would help everyone understand the process for handling complaints more clearly.

### **Dispensation Procedures**

The Standards Committee agreed that any requests by members for dispensations had to be in writing to the Committee. No such requests had been dealt with by the Committee so far.

It was noted that members would often not be aware of the numbers of members who were going to be debarred from the consideration of a particular matter by reason of prejudicial interests until it was too late to call a Standards Committee to consider their requests for dispensation before the meeting took place. In practice members may not

realise they themselves had a prejudicial interest in a report until they saw the agenda when it would be too late to then call a meeting of the Standards Committee with the required 5 days notice.

In some circumstances it might be possible to deal with a request for a dispensation as an urgent item (with the agreement of the Chair).

### **Councillor Induction and Development Plan 2010**

The Committee considered and agreed the Induction and Development Plan for 2010 which included both induction for prospective candidates before the election plus induction for members following the local elections in May.

Standards Committee members attended the induction session on the Code of Conduct run on the weekend in May and encouraged all members to complete the on-line training on the Code to reinforce this session by October 2010. At the time of writing this report only 11 members had registered on-line and of these only 4 members had completed all modules which is rather disappointing.

Feedback from members was that they found the mock licensing and planning meetings very useful as well as the written information given to councillors.

Ward walks between Ward Councillors and a Director had been carried out in Bunhill, Mildmay and Clerkenwell Wards and members found these to be extremely useful.

A programme of more skills based training will be offered to members over the next few months covering chairing, presentation skills and casework.

The Committee noted that the authority would also be applying for the London Council's Member Development Charter and wished them well in their assessment of the good work undertaken so far.

### **Standards Awareness Raising Programme**

The Committee is responsible for publicising and explaining what requirements the code of Conduct places on Councillors to the public, partners and external stakeholders. The Committee agreed at their July meeting a series of briefing bulletins for both members and officers on various aspects of the code to help aid their understanding.

All of the Corporate Induction sessions for new starters to the Council, include a section on the role of Councillors, the Code of Conduct and the Standards Committee.

Visits were also arranged by the Mayor and the Head of Democratic Services to various primary schools in the borough over the year to explain the role of Councillors and the Council to young people. This followed from the successful work that was undertaken with Rowan Arts, a local community organisation that worked with local school children and members to give them the opportunity to meet and talk about issues. The children then took photographs of all the people they interviewed, including Diana Gibbs from this Committee.

The Council were also one of just a few authorities in the country that took part in the British Youth Council's Councillor Shadowing Programme, which gave young people time to be with a range of Councillors to see for themselves what their role involved.

We also hope to organise interviews and articles in the New Year in the Council's Islington Life Magazine again highlighting the work and role of this Committee.

### **Review of the Media Protocol**

To be updated following meeting of the Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> October.

### **Local Assessment and Investigation of Complaints**

During the last year the Initial Assessment Sub-Committee has received four complaints covering seven different Councillors. Of these four complaints, one was referred for investigation but no breach was found and no further action was taken. One was not investigated further and the remaining two have been referred for investigation.

Two complaints were from fellow Councillors and two were from members of the public. One case has been referred to the Review Sub-Committee as the complainant was unhappy with the findings of the Initial Assessment Committee.

No cases have been referred to a full hearing since the Committee was set up.

The complaints have related primarily to the behaviour of members in making comments publicly about others and raise interesting questions about freedom of speech and the degree to which political badinage is acceptable. There have been no allegations of 'corrupt' behaviour or failure to register or declare interests.

### **New Independent Member**

The Committee are pleased to welcome their newest member to the Committee, Arvinda Gohil. She replaces the vacancy left by our longest serving Independent Member, Father Jim Kennedy, who was Chair of the Committee since its first meeting in February 2002. The Committee would like to place on record its thanks to Father Jim for all his hard work over the years and guiding the Committee to the position it is in now.

It was good to see that the Council also sought to mark Father Jim's service, not only to this Committee but for all his community work, by granting him the Freedom of the Borough at a special ceremony to be held in November 2010.

### **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, together with the reports on Gifts and Hospitality.

### **CONCLUSION**

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

The Coalition Government have announced the abolition of Standards for England and we await the details to see how this will affect individual Standards Committees across the country and what measures, if any, will be put in place to deal with the most serious of cases that cannot be dealt with at a local level.

The new Council has 20 new members and my colleagues and I, look forward to working with them and their fellow Councillors to uphold high standards of conduct and ethics within the authority.

**Godfrey Stadlen**  
**Acting Chair of the Islington Standards Committee**