



Standards Committee

Date:	Thursday, 2 December 2010
Time:	6.00 pm
Venue:	Committee Room 1 - Wallasey Town Hall

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AGENDA

1. MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members are asked to consider whether they have personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they are.

2. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 4)

To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 29 September, 2010.

3. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION(FOI) REQUESTS (Pages 5 - 8)

4. CHAIR'S DISCUSSION PAPER - RESPONSE FROM POLITICAL GROUPS (Pages 9 - 12)

5. CHAIR'S DISCUSSION ITEM - HOW TO IMPROVE CONDUCT AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

Verbal report.

6. STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND - ONLINE PUBLICATIONS (Pages 13 - 16)

7. STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND BULLETIN NO 48 (Pages 17 - 20)

8. NEW PROCEDURE FOR STANDARDS COMPLAINTS

Report to follow.

9. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 29 September 2010

<u>Present:</u>	Brian Cummings (Chair)	
	Councillors	
	C Blakeley	C Meaden
	A Bridson	L Rowlands
	WJ Davies	R Wilkins
	K Hayes	P Williams
	AER Jones	
<u>Independent Members</u>	Ken Harrison (Vice-Chair)	Alex Nuttall Stella Elliott

7 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they were. No such declarations were made.

8 MINUTES

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management, submitted the minutes of the meeting held on 21 June, 2010.

Resolved –

That the minutes be received.

9 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

The term of office of the Vice-Chair, Mr Ken Harrison, was due to expire on 31 October, 2010 and the Committee was requested to make a recommendation to Council on the appointment of a Vice-Chair for a four year period commencing on 1 November, 2010.

Resolved – That this Committee recommend to Council that Mr Ken Harrison be appointed Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee for a four year period commencing on 1 November, 2010.

10 **PROPOSED ABOLITION OF STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND**

The Committee received a letter from Standards for England drawing attention to the provisions in the government's Decentralisation and Localism Bill to abolish the Standards Board regime. There would be a period of consultation before final abolition but this was too late to inform preparations for the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees, and this event was therefore cancelled.

Resolved – That the contents of the letter be noted.

11 **USE OF RECORDING MEDIA AT MEETINGS AND IN COUNCIL MEETINGS**

Further to minute 3 (21/6/2010) June 2010), the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management, presented a report which set out the current practices of neighbouring Councils in respect of recording meetings (Appendix A), and proposed a Standing Order and/or a Protocol on the use of recording media in Council buildings, during Council meetings (Appendix B). It also recommended that decisions on recording media other than during meetings should be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with Group Leaders to be determined based on the merits of the request and that there would be no filming/recording/photography at any time in Council buildings if a request had not been made and permission given.

There was a general discussion during which members expressed their reservations regarding the proposed use of regulatory procedures to control the use of recording media in council buildings, having regard to the need for transparency in the way in which the council conducts its business and also continue to allow photography at weddings and other social functions held in the town hall.

It was moved by Councillor Blakeley and seconded by Councillor Rowlands that:

“ The Committee recommends the following:

(a) that the use of recording media within meetings open to the public be unregulated and welcomed, as part of the Council's drive to engage more residents in the workings of the council;

(b) rejects any controls over the use of social media at such meetings and congratulates staff on the creation of Council profiles on Twitter and Facebook;

(c) recommends to Cabinet that all requests for filming rights for broadcasters and producers be managed by the Corporate Marketing Department;

(d) instructs the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management, to enforce all current legal restrictions, including the use of photography at the counting of ballots.

:

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor Jones and seconded by Councillor Williams that:

“ That this matter be referred to a future meeting to allow a much wider discussion involving all members of the council before a decision is made.”

The amendment was put and carried (9:3)

The motion, as amended, was put and carried (12:0)

Resolved (12:0)- That this matter be referred to a future meeting to allow a much wider discussion involving all members of the council before a decision is made.

12 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN - ANNUAL LETTER AND CURRENT PERFORMANCE**

The Director of Finance submitted and reported upon the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Letter (Appendix 1) detailing the following statistical information:

- Total number of contacts received by the Advice Team and the proportion referred to the Investigative Team
- Complaint decisions reached in the reporting period, which include contacts received in the previous year and so do not correspond directly to the number referred to the Investigative Team in the same year
- Response times which are measured on the amount of time (in calendar days) the Council takes to respond to 'first enquiries' made in the reporting period

For the period 1 April 2010 to 31 August 2010 the Council had resolved 23 contacts (out of a total of 29 received), recorded through the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. These were split between preliminary requests for information, full investigations and follow-up enquiries (to a preliminary request or full investigation). Standard response times were 28 calendar days (14 calendar days for schools appeals), unless the LGO set a specific target date for response.

On average contacts were responded to within 11.7 calendar days, which currently represented a significant improvement to the previous reporting period. Analysis of the LGO contacts that took longer than the standard response time of 28 days showed three responses in excess of 80 days, two Adult Social Service replies and one from Housing Benefits. These reflected the level of detail requested by the LGO and the overall complexity of the cases requiring significant resources to investigate fully.

The LGO had noted the positive response from the Council to a number of procedural recommendations from her office, even where maladministration causing injustice was not identified. This was an indication of the willingness to learn from complaints which was having a positive effect on complaint outcomes and informing organisational learning.

Resolved – That the Committee note the contents of this report.

13 **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS, PROCESSES AND PERFORMANCE**

The Director of Finance presented a report outlining the way in which Freedom of Information (FOI) requests were currently processed within the Council.

Jane Corrin, Information Manager, explained that details of requests received were recorded on a central spreadsheet and then monitored, with any follow up emails to officers being produced by the Information Manager. The details from the spreadsheet were used to report performance on FOI processing as both an internal performance indicator to the Finance management team and also to the Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Improvements to this system were being pursued to establish the feasibility of utilising the Customer Relationship Management system (CRM), to log and process FOI requests. The early indications were that some issues regarding the complexity and range of FOI requests did not fit easily with CRM but a proposed solution to support logging, assignment and performance monitoring of FOI requests had been provided.

She responded to questions from members concerning benchmarking and performance comparisons with neighbouring authorities, the cost of pursuing FOI requests, and difficulties experienced by their constituents navigating the Council's new website which could impact on FOI requests.

On a motion by Councillor Blakeley seconded by Councillor Jones it was:-

Resolved – That:

- (1) Jane Corrin be thanked for her presentation and that the report be noted.
- (2) A further report be requested for a future meeting to include comparative data with other local authorities, and the categorisation of requests.

WIRRAL COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

2 DECEMBER 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (FOI) REQUESTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Following the report presented to this Committee on 29 September 2010, it was agreed that a further report should be produced with a breakdown of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests that were received in 2009 and 2010.
- 1.2 It was also agreed that figures from neighbouring Local Authorities should be sought and produced within a new report.
- 1.2 This report analyses the FOI requests which are recorded on a central register and held in calendar year format.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Since the introduction in 2005 of the public right of access to information held by public bodies, Wirral Council continues to receive a higher than average number of FOI requests. Requests come from the local community and also worldwide. Types of requests reflect both local topical issues and also national media stories.
- 2.2. Requests must be received in writing, which includes email, and 95% of requests are by email. There is a Service Request button on the web site which is used to generate an FOI request from the public. The Information Manager receives the requests and liaises with the most appropriate officers in the various Departments of the Council to obtain the information to facilitate the request.
- 2.3 Research shows that the number of requests for local government continues to rise over the years whilst central government figures remain constant.
- 2.4. Because FOI requests are generally anonymous in nature, and because of the use of an email address; it is difficult to demographically categorise requestors. For requests where the identity of the enquirer is clear, it has been noted that there are a higher percentage of men, rather than women who make requests using the legislation.
- 2.5. There are 20 working days in which the Council must provide the information requested or refuse the request and send a response to the enquirer explaining the refusal to supply the information.

2.6. There is a right to an internal review if the requestor is dissatisfied with the response from the Council. In 2009 there were 11 requests for an internal review and in 2010 there were 25 requests for an internal review, 11 of which were from a requestor who had been deemed as vexatious. Internal reviews are facilitated by the Monitoring Officer.

2.7 A comparison is shown below for FOI requests received in 2009 and up to September 2010 with neighbouring Authorities.

WIRRAL		LIVERPOOL		KNOWSLEY		ST HELENS	
MONTH	NUMBER	MONTH	NUMBER	MONTH	NUMBER	MONTH	NUMBER
Jan-09	150	Jan-09	88	Jan-09	45	Jan-09	25
Feb-09	65	Feb-09	99	Feb-09	47	Feb-09	32
Mar-09	84	Mar-09	109	Mar-09	44	Mar-09	25
Apr-09	69	Apr-09	108	Apr-09	50	Apr-09	32
May-09	56	May-09	111	May-09	78	May-09	29
Jun-09	62	Jun-09	109	Jun-09	38	Jun-09	34
Jul-09	64	Jul-09	123	Jul-09	57	Jul-09	37
Aug-09	55	Aug-09	103	Aug-09	44	Aug-09	38
Sep-09	62	Sep-09	108	Sep-09	48	Sep-09	45
Oct-09	100	Oct-09	128	Oct-09	64	Oct-09	53
Nov-09	77	Nov-09	112	Nov-09	54	Nov-09	46
Dec-09	59	Dec-09	91	Dec-09	52	Dec-09	35
	903	Total	1289		621		431
Jan-10	67	Jan-10	84	Jan-10	43	Jan-10	31
Feb-10	55	Feb-10	102	Feb-10	48	Feb-10	35
Mar-10	80	Mar-10	142	Mar-10	72	Mar-10	51
Apr-10	80	Apr-10	97	Apr-10	41	Apr-10	36
May-10	59	May-10	104	May-10	43	May-10	44
Jun-10	80	Jun-10	109	Jun-10	54	Jun-10	50
Jul-10	79	Jul-10	116	Jul-10	50	Jul-10	44
Aug-10	52	Aug-10	106	Aug-10	49	Aug-10	45
Sep-10	65	Sep-10	127	Sep-10	62	Sep-10	54
	617	Total	987		462		390

2.8 The volume of requests for 2009 at Wirral Council was 903 and the volume of requests up to the end of October 2010 has risen to 717. The table below shows the requests broken down by Department. The Finance Department figure includes requests facilitated by the Information Manager, which include non Finance related requests.

Department	Number of Requests in 2009	Number of Requests in 2010 to Oct
Finance	365	248
Technical Services	127	133
Law/HR/Asset Management	102	115
Regeneration	77	
CYPD Education	70	69
CYPD Social Care	46	38
Adult Social Services	50	44
Corporate Services	45	47
Request across more than one Directorate	21	23

- 2.9 A percentage of requests are miscellaneous in their subject matter and difficult to categorise, but a more detailed breakdown of the requests received in 2009 and 2010 are given below.

	No of Requests in 2009	No of Requests in 2010
Requests made by Media	106	100
Whatdotheyknow Website	180	165
Repeated Vexatious	104	2
Education Related	70	69
Financial Enquiries	58	54
Adult Social Care	50	36
Child Social Care	46	30
Parliamentary Researchers	36	7
Highways and Traffic	28	32
Strategic Asset Review	25	3
Waste and Recycling	22	21
Leisure	16	10
Parking	16	14
Expenses and Away Days	15	12
Pensions	15	8
ICT	15	18
Salaries	14	15
Council Tax	14	10
Planning	11	15
Business Rates	11	13
Tranmere Rovers	10	5
Housing Benefit	10	4

(NB: Any categories with less than 10 requests have been omitted from 2009. For comparison against 2009 however, low category numbers for 2010 that appear on the table above have been completed.)

- 2.10 There has been a noted increase in 2010 of requests that relate to the environment such as carbon emissions, phone masts, wind turbines, solar panels, sustainable and locally sourced procurement.
- 2.11 For requests received in 2009 and 2010-up to October where the Council was unable to supply information for various reasons, requestors were still contacted and the reasons their request was refused was explained to them.

	2009	2010
Requests that did not come under the definition of an FOI request	3	3
Requests that would take over the 18.5 person hours limit to fulfil	22	25
Requests that were part of a repeated and vexatious notice	53	2
Requests where the Council did not hold the information in question	55	52
Section 40 Exemption, contains Personal Data	5	4
Section 21 Exemption, information accessible via an alternative means	6	8
Section 22 Exemption, information to be published at a later date	11	3
Section 43 Exemption, information with Commercial interests	13	4

3. FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

3.1. There are none arising from this report.

4. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

4.1. There are none arising directly out of this report.

5. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

5.1. There are no planning implications in this report.

6. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. There are no community safety implications in this report.

7. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

7.1. There are none arising directly out of this report.

8. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

8.1. There are none arising directly out of this report.

9. MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

9.1. There are no particular implications for any Member or ward.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1. Freedom of Information requests.

11. RECOMMENDATION

11.1. That the report be noted.

IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

FNCE/238/10

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

- Build relationships between L.A. and public
 - should be advertised in local press and public buildings. Make public aware of Committee.
- Must be:- Impartial, dutiful, informative, factual and evidential
- Confirm percentage of Officers and Members accept the Code of Conduct and the Standards Committee.
- Apparently there will be a Revised Code in 2010.
- Beware of “tit for tat” complaints. There should be no penalty for putting forward ‘Frivolous’ complaints.
- Discuss with Chief Executive what other roles should be carried out by the Independent Members of Committee.
- Committee should have the opportunity to discuss feedback from the Ombudsman.
- Chairman of Standards Committee is expected to have regular meetings with the Monitoring Officer/Borough Solicitor.
- Hold a review to enable all applicable to understand and interpret the Standards Committee.
- Preach “we can make a difference”. Take up the challenge and invoke our standards.
- Values:- Strive for higher values, conduct, respect, ethics and standards. These and the code must be integral to all Council activities.
- Members must receive training on the Code of Conduct.
- Officers must take strong action against any aboration of the Code.
- Members of the Standards Committee should have access to the Annual Report and attend Council Meetings (Independent Members).
- Standards Committee should build relationships with Officers and Members.
- Chairman of Committee should have meetings with group leaders – build trust.
- Should share experiences with neighbouring Councils.

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- Promote awareness of Standards Committee to schools and local organisations/groups.
- Do not become at odds with elected members; encourage members to attend meetings to raise issues.
- Engage with Councillors. Always appreciate that we are appointed not elected (Independent).
- Be fair and transparent. Rate you independence! “You are serving for the greater good of the Community”.
- Standards Committee is a “friend, not a foe, a guide dog not a watch dog”.
- You must be made aware of concerns of people in the street.
- Must keep Independence – Be careful not to be seen to be more friendly with one group than another.
- Passionate about ethics and standards.
- Monitoring Officers needs:- Courage, motivation, trust, relationships, performance, be moral.
- Be aware of the community impact of committee (letters page in local press/statements etc.)
- What is the perception of public?
Trust and citizens?
Councillors & Officers?
Democracy?
- Bullying of Officers will not be acceptable.
- Planning Committee – what are its protocols?
Can these be explained?
Training – in view of recent events.

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Social Services Similarly

Setting Standards

Councillors Expenses?

Issues for discussion.

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WIRRAL COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 2 DECEMBER 2010

STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND - ONLINE PUBLICATIONS

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee about recent online publications from Standards for England.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 One of Standards for England's key functions is to provide guidance for authorities when implementing the Code of Conduct. It aims to help members, monitoring officers and standards committees "to successfully interpret the Code of Conduct."

It therefore produces a range of guidance materials including various online guides.

The Committee received a report about online guides at its meeting on 29 March 2010 .

3.0 (a) Online Topic Guide – Blogging and (b) Quick guide for Dual – hatted members

3.1 Standards for England have now produced an online topic guide on Blogging.

The guide is "aimed at members who are new to blogging and and social networking as well as experienced bloggers and networkers. It contains information about how the new Code of Conduct may apply to blogging and social networking . it also gives some examples of tribunal cases that have dealt with the issues..

The Blogging topic guide can be found at :

<http://www.standardsforengland.gov.uk/Guidance/TheCodeofConduct/CodeGuidance/Onlineguides/Guidance/TheCodeofConduct/CodeGuidance/Topicguides/Blogging/>

This new topic guide is more detailed than the 'Blogging Quick Guide' published by Standards for England earlier in the year.

The Committee is asked to agree that this latest topic guide should be circulated to all members.

3.2 Standards for England have also produced an online 'quick guide' for Dual-hatted members.

This contains advice on when a dual-hatted member should declare an interest.

The quick guide can be found at:

<http://www.standardsforengland.gov.uk/Guidance/TheCodeofConduct/CodeGuidance/Onlineguides/Quickcodeguides/Dual-hattedmembers/>

3.3 If any member is unable to access either of the guides and would like a hard copy, they should contact the Contact officer named below.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

5.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no specific staffing implications arising from this report.

6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no specific equal opportunities implications arising from this report.

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no community safety implications arising from this report.

8.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21

8.1 There are no local agenda 21 implications arising from this report.

9.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no specific planning implications arising from this report.

10.0 ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no anti-poverty implications arising from this report.

11.0 SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no social inclusion implications arising from this report.

12.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no local member support implications.

13.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

13.1 www.standardsforengland –online guides

14.0 RECOMMENDATION

14.1 Committee is requested to note the contents of this report.

BILL NORMAN

DIRECTOR OF LAW, HR AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

This Bulletin comes at a time of big change for us following the Government's announcement of its intention 'to abolish the Standards Board regime'. Whilst we still await the detail of this policy, we will share with you what we know about what is proposed, and outline the timetable for our closure.

Although we have had to modify our work programme in light of this proposal, we remain 'open for business' and set out in this Bulletin our schedule of activities for the coming year. We are committed to continuing to work with you and support you in operating the standards framework successfully.

This is a sad month for us as we say goodbye to many valued staff leaving the organisation in our first wave of redundancies. We are losing people who have contributed much to this organisation, and many of whom have worked for us for some time. They will be much missed. We wish them all well in their future endeavours and thank them sincerely for their hard work.

The Future of Standards for England and the Standards Framework

The Government's 'Programme for Government' of 20 May 2010 contained the commitment to "abolish the Standards Board regime". Primary legislation is needed to abolish Standards for England, and we expect the provisions to be included in the planned Decentralisation and Localism Bill which is due to be presented in late 2010, with Royal Assent anticipated between July and October 2011. This is likely to lead to final closure of this organisation sometime between 31 December 2011 and 31 March 2012. We have not seen any transitional provisions at this stage but will provide an update in a later Bulletin, when we know more.

In the light of these circumstances we have reviewed our business plan for this year and next. Our current priorities are to fulfil our statutory duties, to support local authorities in maintaining high standards and to assist the government in developing and implementing any new arrangements they may choose to put in place.

In the meantime, the local standards framework still exists and standards committees and monitoring officers have an obligation to keep the system operating.

In order to assist you we will:

- Continue to provide advice and information to those who phone or write to us with queries about the standards regime via our enquiries helpline, monitoring officer helpline or press helpline. We will respond immediately where we can by telephone or in writing by post or email.
- Update our guidance on the framework to make it easier to use.

There will be changes to the content of the guidance where sections may be out of date, inaccurate or incorrect. We have received several suggestions from stakeholders and will incorporate these in the guidance where appropriate.

The format of the guidance is changing to make it easier to use and more helpful. It will highlight all statutory requirements and provide a link to the relevant legislation.

We are not proposing to produce any other new guidance products, unless a specific need is identified. All revised guidance will only be available via our website.

- Produce an updated case review.

As a result of a request from the Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors, and to assist the standards community as a whole, we are updating the Case Review 2007 to reflect cases decided by the First Tier and Upper Tribunals since the Case Review was last updated in 2008.

- Continue to carry out investigations referred to us by standards committees.

See the article towards the end of this bulletin on the factors we take into account when deciding whether to accept cases for investigation

- Maintain existing relationships with key stakeholder organisations.

Standards for England will continue to provide support to those in the regulated and standards community who have requested our help with ethical issues.

- Meet requests for staff to give presentations or attend training events.

We will continue to provide staff and material for presentations and training events where we are requested to attend and where it fits in with our current business plan.

- Maintain our web site as a resource to support standards committees.

We will carry out routine maintenance of our website and the guidance we provide on it. We have published our Annual Report and Annual Accounts online but we will not be printing these publications.

An update on monitoring returns

In June 2010 we sent out an email to all monitoring officers explaining that we had decided to postpone the return for the April to June quarter. As part of the review of the Business Plan we considered our requests for local authorities to complete quarterly monitoring. There will be no further requests for the submission of quarterly or annual returns. We do not anticipate re-establishing these procedures, unless a specific monitoring need arises in which we have to play a part.

The online questionnaires have been removed from our website and are now inaccessible. However, the information submitted by local authorities is available on request. If any authority wishes to obtain a copy we can provide them with pdf versions of any of the following:

- The standards committee composition details, correct as of the last date of monitoring (31 March 2010)
- Two years of case information, listed in chronological order by date received
- Annual Return 2008/09
- Annual Return 2009/10

Please email requests to authorityreturns@standardsforengland.gov.uk

Aggregated summary statistics of the quarterly return information are still available online at

<http://www.standardsforengland.gov.uk/CaseinformationReporting/Localstatistics/>

We will shortly be publishing an online report of the annual return information collected for 2009/10. This includes an introduction to the data, a key figures page, a summary of the findings and a full list of all the most common responses to each question.

Acceptance of Complaints by SfE

We have reviewed the factors we take into account when assessing if we will accept cases in the public interest, referred to us by local standards committees, for investigation. We reviewed the factors to see whether they were still appropriate taking into account the Government's stated policy, its localist approach to regulation of local government and our reduced budget.

We concluded that both the underlying criterion of public interest and the relating factors are consistent with our statutory purpose and continue to be valid while the current standards framework remains in place. Therefore we have not made any changes to the factors or criterion. However, when considering whether to accept cases we will have to have regard to the resources we have available and take account of the relative importance of cases.

Reappointment of Independent members

We have been asked if an authority has to follow our recommendation that independent members serve no more than two terms of four years after which new members should be recruited. Some authorities are concerned that, given the current uncertainty regarding the future of the standards regime, it may be preferable to retain those who have been trained and understand their role rather than to try to recruit and appoint new members. In light of the uncertain future of the standards framework we advise that, as long as the original appointment was carried out in accordance with all the correct legal requirements at the time (e.g. approved by full council, after being openly advertised and having assessed the suitability of all the applicants) an authority can extend that term for a further period. This can only be done during the term of office of an existing independent member and by approval from full council. Once the independent member's term has expired the full recruitment procedures must be followed again.

Tell us how it should be done

The Standards Forum now has more than 1,100 users and over 200 posts on almost 70 different topics. The subjects of vexatious complaints, informing the subject member about a complaint and promoting ethical behaviour continue to be popular. More recently posts about subject members resigning before an election and discussions about the future of the standards regime have been generating interest.

If you have anything to say about these issues or if you want to share good practice, seek advice from your peers or simply draw attention to something you think might be relevant to others, do it on the Forum. To have your say, visit:

www.standardsforengland.gov.uk/resources/TheStandardsForum/

The Forum is open to members of standards committees, monitoring officers and other relevant council officers. If you are not currently registered for the Forum and would like to have access, please email: forum@standardsforengland.gov.uk