

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COUNCIL

Uttlesford District Council's Standards Committee 2011/12

Background

This is likely to be the last report to the Council of the Standards Committee in its present format. The Localism Act is expected to come into full force on 1 July 2012 and will abolish the current standards framework replacing it with a requirement to adopt a code of conduct which is largely left to the discretion of councils; sweeping changes to the law on registration and declarations of interest and the revocation of the power to impose sanctions. Although there will be a role for independent participation in considering breaches of the Code of Conduct sadly the Act disqualifies your existing independent members from fulfilling that function.

Composition

The Standards Committee comprises 10 members, 4 elected members of the council, 3 independent persons and 3 representatives of town and parish councils. The committee is chaired by Mr Sean Brady one of the independent persons. The Committee is supported by the Assistant Chief Executive – Legal and Monitoring Officer, Mr Michael Perry. One of the town and parish seats on the Committee became vacant at the may 2011 elections and has remained vacant since.

Meetings during the year

There were 3 scheduled meetings of the Standards Committee during the council year and in addition there was an extra-ordinary meeting to deal with the Code of Conduct after the Localism Bill received Royal Assent. In the light of the Localism Bill the Committees work during the year was concentrated on prospective changes to the standards framework much of which needed to be revisited after the Bill became and Act. This has resulted in the recommendation of constitutional changes to reflect the provisions of the Localism Act which it is understood will be proposed by the Constitution Working Group. It has also resulted in a proposed Code of Conduct which the Standards Committee recommend for adoption and new procedures for vetting complaints. In addition to this work programme the Committee continued to receive regular updates on decisions on of the First Tier Tribunal Local Government Standards in England.

Sub committees met on a number of occasions to consider allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct. 1 such allegations related to a parish councillors, the other 2 related to district councillors. The allegation against the parish councillor resulted in no action being taken. One complaint against a district councillor resulted in a finding that the member concerned had breached the Council's Code of Conduct but no sanction being imposed. This decision is currently subject to an appeal to the First Tier Tribunal – Local Government Standards in England. The other allegation was passed for investigation and this is ongoing.

Future Actions

Under transitional provisions the current Standards Committee will remain responsible for dealing with allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct made before the new provisions take effect. Thereafter a new Standards Committee constituted under the Localism Act will take over.