

Annual Report to the Council

Uttlesford District Council's Standards Committee 2009/10

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 and Monitoring Officer, Mr Michael Perry. During the course of the year there has been a change in the representation of the towns and parishes. Mr Philip Leeder ceased to be eligible for that role upon his resignation from Thaxted Parish Council. He was replaced by Councillor Mel Sullivan of Hatfield Heath Parish Council. Cllr James of Dunmow Town Council resigned as a member of the Standards Committee and was replaced by Cllr Clark of Elsenham Parish Council.

Meetings during the year

There were 5 scheduled meetings of the Standards Committee during the council year. The committee completed a work programme which included reviewing the Code of Probity in Planning; working in partnership and standards; considering the order of the council agenda; chairman and member training; giving assistance to parishes with regard to standards; branding the Standards Committee; communications; dealing with confidential information; promoting democracy and changes to the Adjudication Panel. In addition the committee devised a satisfaction feedback questionnaire to be submitted to complainants and subject members to enable the performance of the committee to be monitored. The committee also drew up a work plan for the following year.

Sub committees met on 7 occasions to consider 9 allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct. Eight such allegations related to parish councillors, one related to a district councillor. In 2 of the cases (including that of the district councillor) the sub committee decided no action was required. The other 7 cases were referred to the Monitoring Officer for investigation. 2 of those investigations were completed in the course of the year leading to hearings before a Standards Sub Committee and sanctions being imposed. The other cases are still under investigation.

Highlights from the year:

- The committee has successfully implemented the procedure for vetting allegations for investigation.
- The Committee reviewed and revised the Code of Probity in Planning in accordance with guidance from the Standards Board which policy was adopted by Full Council.

- The Committee began a programme of visits by members of the committee to town and parishes in order to support those councils in observing the Code of Conduct.
- The Committee arranged training for two parish councils on aspects of the Code of Conduct where difficulties within the parishes had arisen.
- In addition, the Committee received regular updates on decisions of the Adjudication Panel, later the First Tier Tribunal Local Government Standards in England.

Future Actions

- The Committee is considering how the standards framework may change in the light of the government's pledge to abolish Standards for England.
- The Committee will consider what implications there may be for standards arising from the possibility of a move from a committee form of governance to a cabinet administration.
- The Committee will be considering amendments to the Licensing Act 2003 which allow members to make representations in their own right with regard to licences and licensing applications.
- The Committee will be re-examining the approach used for the appointment of town and parish representatives.