

**Standards Committee - 15<sup>th</sup> October 2008**

**Report of the Monitoring Officer**

**Standards Board for England : Annual Review 2007/8**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To consider the Annual Review of the Standards Board for England for 2007/8.

**Background**

2. A copy of the 2007/8 Annual Review of the Standards Board for England has been placed in the Members' Room. The current Chairman and Chief Executive of the Standards Board are Dr Robert Chilton and Glenys Stacey who replaced Sir Anthony Holland and David Prince earlier this year.
3. As the Committee is aware, the role of the Standards Board formally changed in May 2008 when it became a strategic organisation charged with ensuring the effectiveness of the arrangements for dealing with complaints locally and for setting the standards agenda nationally.
4. The Standards Board consider that their key achievements for 2007/8 include:-
  - The publication of key advice on the implications of the revised Code of Conduct.
  - Ensuring that 99% of monitoring officers and 90% of standards committee members knew of the changes to the new Code by its adoption date of the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2007.
  - 44% of members think that standards of behaviour have improved in recent times. This is up from 27% in 2004.
  - 2 in 3 stakeholders now consider that the information and guidance published by the Standards Board communicates key messages "very or fairly well".
  - The average time taken from receipt of allegations to notification was 10 working days.
5. The Annual Review also includes a number of key performance indicators as measured by BMG Research of stakeholders in 2007. Results show that overall satisfaction with the Standards Board is now only 38% though this is an increase from 29% in 2004. In addition, only 23% of respondents speak highly of the Standards Board which is a slight increase from 21% in 2004. In addition, 80%

of respondents consider that maintaining high standards of behaviour is one of the most important local government issues.

6. In 2007/8 the Standards Board organised a series of pilots designed to provide an overview of how the new system for local initial assessment of complaints might work in practice. One of these pilots saw 38 standards committees consider 10 real, but anonymised, complaints. Interestingly on average local standards committees referred 6 of the 10 cases for local investigation which must be compared with the average for the Standards Board of 3 out of 10.
7. A summary of the relevant facts and figures for 2007/8 is as follows:-
  - 3,547 allegations received.
  - 66% of allegations from members of the public.
  - 14% of allegations referred for investigation.
  - 10 days to decide whether to refer a complaint for investigation.
  - Of the cases referred to ethical standards officers there were 293 final findings in investigations. In 199 of these investigations there was either no evidence of breach or no further action taken. Only 15 investigations were referred to a monitoring officer/standards committee for a local determination and only 8 were referred to the Adjudication Panel for England.
  - 285 allegations were referred to monitoring officers for local investigation.
8. In 2008/9 the Standards Board will be developing their strategic role which will include effective monitoring of the local framework for dealing with complaints. Their main aim will be to ensure that the system as a whole is fair both for those who are complained about and to the complainants. The monitoring system that has been set up requires monitoring officers to make quarterly reports on line giving details of complaints that have been received within that quarter and how such complaints are being processed.
9. The Annual Review contains a number of case summaries and these are attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

### **Finance**

10. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

### **Law**

11. The relevant legislation regarding the Standards Board for England is contained in Part III of the Local Government Act 2000.

### **Equality Impact**

12. This report complies fully with the Council's policies on equality and diversity and there are no particular implications for children and young people.

## **Recommendation**

13. It is recommended that this report be noted.

*John Polychronakis*

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**J. Polychronakis.**

Monitoring Officer

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## **List of Background Papers**

1. Standards Board for England : Annual Review 2007/8.