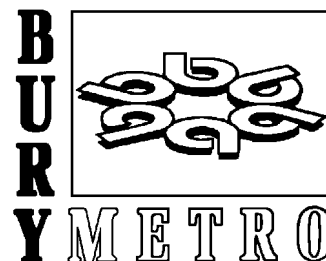


METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF BURY

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2008/2009



I have pleasure in presenting this Annual Report which gives Members an insight into the work of the Standards Committee.

This Municipal Year has been the busiest ever for the Standards Committee following the introduction of the local assessment of complaints, a function passed to us from the national Standards Board. We have also, for the first time, granted dispensations to members allowing them to participate in a meeting notwithstanding their prejudicial interests. I would like to thank members of the Committee for their hard work and support during this most challenging of years.

The membership this year was:

Councillors Sharon Briggs, Roger Brown, Yvonne Creswell, Farook Chaudhry, Vic D'Albert, David Higgin and Michelle Wiseman.

The Independent Members were myself (Anne Brown), Arthur Withington, Ken Wainwright and Aidan Loyns.

As Members are aware, Aidan Loyns sadly passed away in December 2008 and the Committee lost a dedicated and conscientious independent member. Once again I would like to pay tribute to his excellent contribution to the work of the Committee.

For 2009/2010, the Chair of the Committee will be Arthur Withington.

Recent Government legislation has substantially extended the role of Standards Committees. The national Standards Board has a very apt strap line which is "Confidence in Local Democracy". This is very important currently and apt, because the main role of the Standards Committee is to create a sense of ethical well being in the Council so that our communities can trust in and engage with the Council. The Committee is therefore about promoting and ensuring good governance – openness, transparency and honesty; maintaining high standards of conduct and behaviour by all Councillors and co-opted members who take part in Council activities. This can be a difficult task as it is about our cultures and values. Yet we must have high standards otherwise how can we account to, engage with and lead our communities.

Regulations governing local assessment of complaints became effective on 8 May 2008. Standards Committee Members now have four separate but distinct roles in relation to complaints about member conduct:

- § Receiving and Assessing Complaints
- § Reviewing Local Assessment Decisions
- § Considering the outcome of investigations
- § Conducting Hearings following investigation, if so determined.

We have established four Sub-Committees for each of the above and reviewed the procedures for operating in this way.

In considering complaints, the Standards Referral Sub-Committee has delegated powers, including: referring the allegation for investigation; refer the allegation for action short of formal investigation or deciding that no action should be taken in respect of an allegation.

If the Sub-Committee decides that a matter does not merit investigation then the complainant can appeal and ask for the complaint to be re-considered. When a matter is referred for investigation, a Standards Consideration Sub-Committee is convened to consider the outcome of the investigation, the recommendations and decide on appropriate action. This could lead to the convening of a full Standards Hearing.

This is not an easy process and to date, the Standards Referral Sub-Committee has considered eight complaints against Members. Of these, five are currently the subject of investigation.

Despite having to deal with complaints at such an early stage in the new Local Filtering process, it remains my view that standards of conduct among elected members in Bury are high and I am most keen to ensure that this situation prevails. We send out a regular bulletin and arrange for the training of members. The Group Leaders have also been supportive in reminding members of their responsibilities under the Council's Code of Conduct, and I am grateful for that.

In October of last year I attended, with the Monitoring Officer, the Annual Standards Conference which focussed very much upon local standards in action and how local arrangements were working. I came away very confident that Bury had got to grips with the new arrangements quickly and efficiently and that we were at the forefront in terms of the ethical framework.

The Standards Committee has a key role in creating an ethical organisation and setting an example within the Council. This is not just about enforcing the Code. It is about relationships, both internally between members and the Council's staff and externally with members of the public and other stakeholders and partners. It is about how the Council relates to the Community and improves the services it provides. We must all own this agenda and show leadership and involvement at the highest level. For our part, the Standards Committee members will continue to undergo intensive training in order to enhance our knowledge and understanding of the new arrangements.

ANNE BROWN
CHAIR OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE 2008/2009