

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 10 DECEMBER 2009

REVIEW OF PUBLICITY AND GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS FOR CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS

REPORT OF HEAD OF LEGAL SERVICES AND MONITORING OFFICER

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide details of the proposed changes to documentation used to publicise the local code of conduct complaints system and to confirm the publicity which will be undertaken to inform the local community of these changes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Committee approves the new documentation attached to this report, subject to any comments/amendments that they consider appropriate.

3. SUMMARY

The new local filtering system for considering code of conduct complaints has now been in place for about 18 months. It is appropriate to review the documentation and the publicity that informs the public about their right to make a complaint to the Standards Committee. Updated documents have been produced to assist the public with regard to the complaint process.

4. PREVIOUS MINUTES

Standards Committee – 21 April 2009 (ST-38)

5. INFORMATION

5.1 Background

- 5.1.1 The local system for filtering code of conduct complaints came into force on the 8 May 2008. Documentation was initially prepared to be based on the guidance set out by Standards for England and this has been made available by placing the documents on the council's website, providing hard copies of the documentation to members of the public who have requested them and by sending the documentation to the parish councils within the borough.

5.1.2 These documents have now been reviewed and updated for consideration by this committee. The documents which have been updated are set out below:-

(i) Public notice providing basic details of the complaints system – attached to appendix 1a is the document produced in accordance with Standards for England guidelines in May 2008. At appendix 1b an updated version of that document has been prepared which is aimed at setting out basic information in a straight forward way. This document will be placed on the notice boards in reception at the Civic Offices and Darby House and copies will be sent to all parish clerks to be displayed on notice boards at the parish and town councils within the borough. In addition the document will be made available on the council's website. The committee may wish to consider whether or not there should be further distribution of this notice.

(ii) Complaint form and guidance - At appendix 2a the original complaint form is attached. This committee commented upon the form earlier in the year and a new form has been prepared which incorporates those comments at appendix 2b. Also at appendix 2b there is a guidance document which includes the new complaint form. Officers appreciate that there are a number of documents which make a lengthy amount of documentation for members of the public requesting information about the complaints process. However, officers have ensured that the documentation is straightforward and easy to understand. Unfortunately there is a significant amount of information to be provided to members of the public given the complexity of the system and the details which need to be provided to them. Officers consider that the documentation translates those complex systems into a straightforward process which is easy to understand. It also anticipates the many questions which members of the public in particular will have with regard to the system. The length of the documents is also dictated by the need to include the various amounts of contact information including details of the 26 parish councils within the borough of Telford & Wrekin. The intention is for this documentation to be available in hard copy from reception at the Civic Offices, to be provided to those members of the public who contact the council using the contact details set out in the notice attached at Appendix 1b of this report, for electronic and hardcopies to be sent to all of the parish councils and parish and town councils in the borough and for the documentation to be made available on the council's website (and to be more easily available than the complaint form is currently).

5.2 Equality and Diversity

The documentation and the process should be compliant with all equality and diversity requirements and ensure that the complaints system is available for use by the whole of the community.

5.3 Environmental Impact

No implications.

5.4 Legal Implications

The Standards for England Guidance states that the standards committee should take responsibility for publicising the local complaints system. The standards committee are required by statute to give consideration to that guidance. However, the guidance is not prescriptive as to what specifically needs to be done. The decision on how the local system is to be publicised is a matter for the standards committee.

There is no legal requirement to produce guidance which supports the code of conduct complaints procedure but it is recommended as such guidance will assist in ensuring that the public are kept fully informed as to the complaints system and that it would also assist the standards committee in receiving complaints which hopefully include all of the relevant information required for an assessment to be made.

5.5 Links with Corporate Priorities

Ensuring that the council gives due regard to Standards for England Guidance and makes the complaints system accessible to all of the community will assist the council in achieving its priority being an efficient, effective and customer focussed council.

5.6 Opportunities and Risks

The risks and opportunities associated with introducing this new documentation have been assessed. The opportunities that will arise from improving our documentation and communication with the public with regard to the local ethical framework will be improved as a result.

5.7 Financial Implications

The cost of producing and circulating the new documents will be met within existing resources. Maximum use of electronic distribution will minimise costs. Any variances will be highlighted as part of the regular financial monitoring process.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

The Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008

The Standards for England Guidance – The Role of Makeup of
Standards Committees

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