

**Standards Committee : 28 April 2010**

**Title of report: Development of the Standards Materials on the Kirklees Council Website**

<b>Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Is it in the Council's Forward Plan?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Is it eligible for "call in" by Scrutiny?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Cabinet member portfolio</b>	<b>Corporate</b>

**Electoral wards affected and ward councillors consulted: All**

**Public or private: Public**

## **1. Purpose of Report**

When members of standards committee attended the Annual Assembly for Standards Committees in October 2009 one of the sessions was called "The Highly Effective Standards Committee" and this included material on "Putting the Public in the Picture" and how individual council's websites could be used to promote the work of the standards committee to the public. A summary of the relevant questions standards committees should be asking about their websites forms the Annex to this report. The purpose of this report is to brief standards committee on the current information on the Council's website on standards matters and to suggest a way forward to improve the way the website can be accessed by members of the public looking for information about standards matters.

## **2. Key Points**

The way in which the standards part of the Kirklees Council website can currently be accessed is as follows:

- There is link from the front page of the Kirklees web site headed "make a complaint" which takes the user to a second page which lists a range

of potential complaint categories, including making a complaint about a councillor.

- Clicking on “making a complaint about a councillor” takes the user to a page with details of the Standards Committee membership and a further link to the Revised Terms of Reference of the Standards Committee along with links to criteria used in assessing new complaints, information for potential complainants, and a complaints form (which can be downloaded and printed for completion by the complainant). Some of the links appear twice – once in the main text and again in a small box at the side of the page.
- There is no link to the Code of Conduct itself, which is elsewhere on the website as part of the Constitution and is not straightforward to find.
- There is further information about the standards committee on the website as part of the Constitution.
- There is no link to the Standards Committee’s Annual Report, which would be available on the website as part of a committee report, but which would not be straightforward to find.

When compared with the questions set out in the Annex the current arrangements on the website could be improved so as to:

- Bring all the relevant information about standards together in one place on the website by providing links to all the relevant information from one page. This is known as a web portal or links page and is a mechanism for bringing diverse information together in one place, to make it easier for users to access the information they need. This would involve reviewing the information which should be available and ensuring that it is in plain English and comprehensible.
- Provide more explanation about what the Code of Conduct is for, the role of the standards committee and so on. This could include information about:
  - the importance of high ethical standards in Kirklees and what Kirklees is doing to ensure ethical conduct within the council,
  - information about the numbers of complaints, the stages reached by the various complaints and the decision notices
  - links to useful websites such as Standards for England and the Local Government Ombudsman

In the longer term the website materials on standards could be extended to include additional on-line services such as FAQs, newsletters, and forums. These would require an additional investment of time and resource as well as on-going commitment to their maintenance.

Improving the website would appear to be best dealt with in at least two stages. The Council’s web team could create the portal to bring together

existing materials fairly quickly but the other issues will inevitably take longer and require more officer input. A first step could be for an officer and a member of Standards Committee to meet with a view to scrutinising existing material and updating it where required, The next step would be to meet with the Web Team to develop the portal.

Once the portal is up and running a report could be brought back to committee and a demonstration arranged so that committee could discuss what further information should be made available via the portal and whether additional on-line resources should be made available. The latter would depend upon the resources available.

### **3. Implications for the Council**

In order to fulfil its role of promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct among members the standards committee needs to make the public aware of its role and the procedures for making complaints about member conduct. Greater openness and transparency about the standards process should help improve standards and engender public confidence in the system.

The cost of [ ] would be [ ] and would be met from the [ ] budget.

### **4. Consultees and their opinions**

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### **5. Officer recommendations and reasons**

It is recommended that:

5.1 Approval be given to creating a web portal for the standards materials on the Kirklees Council website.

5.2 A member of standards committee be nominated to progress the web portal proposals with officers.

5.3 A further report be submitted to standards committee when the portal is operational.

### **6. Cabinet portfolio holder recommendation**

N/a

### **7. Next steps**

See recommendation.

### **8. Contact member and officer and relevant papers**

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Background Papers:

Materials from the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees 2009 –  
“Putting the People in the Picture”

## **ANNEX**

### **SUMMARY OF THE “PUTTING THE PEOPLE IN THE PICTURE” MATERIAL FROM THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES 2009**

1. How easy is it to find anything to do with the standards committee on your website?
2. Does the standards committee have its own page or section on the website?
3. Is there a clear explanation of what the standards committee does on the website? Is it up to date?
4. Can you find the names of standards committee members?
5. Does the website feature information about any proactive work the committee has done to raise the profile of standards, or any information about the standards committee's work programme?
6. Does the website include decision notices and other information to publicise how your authority has handled complaints?
7. Is the Code of Conduct for your authority published on the website?
8. Is it possible to find out how to complain about an elected member on your website?
9. is there a link to the Standards for England website?
10. Does your website promote the value of high standards in public behaviour?