



Annual Report

of the Standards & Ethics Committee
2006 – 2007

Introduction by the Independent Chairman, Barbara Cooper:

“ I am pleased to present the first Annual Report of the Standards & Ethics Committee of Stratford-on-Avon District Council. It covers the Council year 2006/07, during which the Committee met six times in public session. In addition, two sub-committees were convened during the year for the purpose of hearing complaints of alleged misconduct referred for local determination by the Standards Board for England.



The Committee (full details of which are set out below) has undergone some changes during the year:

- **Diane Wilkinson**, an Independent Member of the Committee since its establishment and its Chairman from July 2005 to January 2006, retired in 2006 and has been succeeded by **William Hannis**;
- District Councillor **Clifford Meade** resigned as a Councillor and as a member of the Committee in 2006 and has been succeeded by Councillor **Sue Adams**;
- District Councillor **Peter Morse** was appointed a Member following his election to the Council in 2006

I would like to thank all Members of the Committee for their commitment and enthusiasm during the year. Thanks are also due to the Monitoring Officer, **Liam Nevin**, and other Council Officers for their hard work in support of the Committee's activities.”

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Committee was established in 2001 as a requirement of the Local Government Act 2000 and has as its principal responsibility the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct within the District Council and partner organisations.

Activities carried out by the Committee include:

- advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct introduced by the Local Government Act 2000;
- assisting District and Parish Councillors and co-opted members to observe the Members' Code of Conduct;
- ensuring that appropriate training is available to all Councillors and co-opted members on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct;
- hearing complaints of alleged misconduct referred to the Council by the Standards Board for England;
- monitoring the operation of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy to enable staff to raise any concerns about possible fraudulent and unlawful conduct within the Council;
- monitoring the Council's complaints handling processes and the outcome of investigations by the Local Government Ombudsman; and
- reviewing the Council's involvement on outside bodies.

ACTIVITIES DURING 2006/07

Good progress has been achieved during the year in a number of areas of high priority for ethical governance within the Council. These include:

Member/Officer Protocol

On the Committee's recommendation, the Council has formally adopted a Member/Officer Protocol which gives written guidance on the relationship between Members and Officers, and other Council employees. The Protocol seeks to:

- define the respective roles of Members and Officers;
- promote trust, openness, fairness and honesty in relationships between Members and Officers; and
- set out procedures for dealing with concerns by Members or Officers.

Whistleblowing

The Standards and Ethics Committee initiated a review of the Council's existing Confidential

Reporting Policy and has been instrumental in its re-launch as the Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure. The revised procedure, which was published on the Council's website in June 2006, intends to enable employees, councillors and members of the public to raise serious concerns about activities within the Council for prompt investigation and resolution, rather than overlooking a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside the Council. Examples of activities covered by the Whistleblowing procedure include unauthorised use of Council funds, fraud, corruption, health and safety and environmental issues.

World Class Stratford

At the Committee's suggestion, World Class Stratford has adopted a voluntary code of conduct based closely on the Members' Code of Conduct.

Councillor training

The Committee has been active throughout the year in monitoring the availability, content and quality of training provided to Councillors with responsibility for planning and licensing matters and has worked closely with Officers to devise methods for evaluating the effectiveness of such training.

Freedom of Information

During the year, the Committee has assumed responsibility on behalf of the Council for hearing appeals from members of the public against decisions by Council Officers to withhold information requested under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Committee Members have undertaken training in preparation for this new role.

Ethical governance

Following a survey of District Councillors and senior officers in early 2006, the Committee has endorsed an action plan designed to raise standards of ethical governance, in particular by improving understanding of the Code of Conduct, raising awareness of ethical issues and fostering relationships of trust within the Council. The Committee has monitored progress with the implementation of the action plan, culminating in a repeat survey of Councillors and senior officers.

Local determinations

In accordance with its responsibility for hearing complaints of alleged misconduct referred to the Council by the Standards Board for England, the Committee has on two separate occasions during the year formally appointed Determination of Complaints Sub-Committees, in both cases to deal with alleged

complaints against Parish Councillors. In the first case, the relevant Sub-Committee concluded on the basis of the reports received that no further action should be taken. In the second case, the Sub-Committee concluded that the Parish Councillor concerned had breached the Code and made appropriate recommendations.

Members of the Committee have undertaken extensive training during the year to ensure that any future local determinations can continue to be handled fairly and expeditiously.

Future work programme

Following the Government's recent issue of a revised Model Code of Conduct for local authorities, the District Council and all Parish Councils will have to adopt the new Code. Committee Members will be actively involved in advising the Council on the implications of the revised Code and in monitoring the content, quality and effectiveness of training provided for District and Parish Councillors, whilst being aware of the importance of attending training themselves. This awareness of the need for continued training and development within the Committee is also highlighted by the attendance of three nominated Members at the Fifth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees, hosted by the Standards Board for England, in October 2006.

The Committee will also maintain its well-established programme for monitoring the quality of Member training on licensing and planning matters and reviewing complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman about the Council. Through these and other activities, it will continue to contribute to the improvement of the Council's processes.

Membership

As stated in the Constitution, the Council established a Standards and Ethics Committee with the following composition:

- four District Councillors (other than the Leader) nominated by the political groups in proportion to the make-up of the Council;
- four Independent Members nominated by the Committee itself following public advertisement and interview. Independent Members are not associated with the Council but are members of the public who express an interest in the work of the Committee and they are entitled to vote at meetings; and
- four Parish Councillors. At least one parish member must be present when matters relating to parish councils or their members are being considered. Parish members are entitled to vote at meetings.

The Members of the Committee during the year 06/07 were:



Sue Adams

is a District Councillor and was elected in August 2006. She joined the Standards and Ethics Committee shortly thereafter.

Dr Peter Bebbington

is an Independent Member and Vice Chairman of the Committee and was appointed to the Committee in July 2005.



Rosalind Bolton

is a Parish Councillor and the Chairman of Wellesbourne Parish Council. She was appointed to the Committee in 2003.

Barbara Cooper

has been an Independent Member since March 2004 and was elected as Chairman of the Committee in 2006.



Mark Flower

is a District Councillor and was elected to the Council in October 2004. He has been a member of the Committee since 2004.

Len Gale

is a Parish Councillor, and was appointed to the Committee in 2002.



William Hannis

represents the Committee as an Independent Member. Bill was appointed in Autumn 2006.

Peter Moore

is a District Councillor. Elected to the Council in January 2006, Peter joined the Standards and Ethics Committee in the same year.



Myles Pollock

is a Parish Councillor and was appointed as Member of the Committee in September 2002.

Tom Ross

is a Parish Councillor and was appointed to the Committee in September 2002.



Isobel Seccombe

is a District Councillor. She was elected to the Council in January 2002 and has been a member of the Committee since 2002.

Neville Shannon

is an Independent Member and was appointed to the Committee in July 2005.

