

**Notes of Informal Meeting between Members of Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington & Chelsea Standards Committee Members, Hammersmith Town Hall, 3 December 2009**

**Attendance:** Cllrs Alford, Cowan, Homan, Donald Johnson, Steven Moussavi, Chris Troke, Joyce Epstein, Michael Cogher, Kayode Adewumi, David Bays (H&F).  
Cllr. Cox, Sophia Lambert, LeVerne Parker, Jennifer Ware [late], (K&C)

Apologies: Grace Moody-Stuart [flu], Cllr Lady Hanham, Cllr. Judith Blakeman.

The Deputy Mayor welcomed Members to the Foyer reception

The Chair welcomed Members to the main Meeting in the Chamber.

**SfE Chairman**

Bob Chilton, Chair of Standards for England (SfE), outlined how the SfE had dealt with cases during the implementation of the new system and possible developments in the future.

All SfE cases referred to it had been dealt with in 4 months.

He stressed the need to have a national framework in place. Aware that there was pressure on spending and that there was an anti-quango mood currently.

The present system was working well especially as it was devolving services locally – so most routine cases being dealt with by “unsung heroes” in local authorities.

Cllr Cowan raised the possibility of widening remit to include a . Code for Officers as well as Members – the issue on this was that Officers were covered by their own Contract of Employment. However, there was some sympathy with idea at Government level.

Sophia Lambert, Chair of K&C’s Standards Committee, raised whether there could be a Panel of independent assessors to verify that Councils in appointing Independent Members had conducted a fair process; and would it be a better system if there were a majority of Independents on STCs, not just being chaired by an Independent? Bob Chilton was not very sympathetic on this one – there could be cost implications of the Panel idea which would not be easy to promote in the current climate of financial stringency.

Sophia Lambert also raised whether there could be some intermediate stage instead of complaints going straight to Members; and could some cases which might normally go for investigation be dealt with differently. Also, the No Further Action outcome was not totally satisfactory as the Member being complained about can still feel aggrieved at the result.

SfE had previously had a big build up of cases – now they were only dealing with the significant ones, the system was a lot quicker. Currently, 94% of cases were being dealt with locally. The London average was about 5 local cases a year per London Borough.

The main problems centred around planning issues and about prejudicial interests. Overall, 166 cases had been referred to SfE.

Across the country 94% Members had agreed to need to sign up to the Code of Conduct. The initial problem with Parish Councils on this had now been overcome with National Association of Local Councils being an advocate of the new system to their Members.

Compared with central Government [MPs' Expenses etc], local government had much better standards of governance.

He stressed that SfE did not “gag” the system – guidance clarified that Councillors could still carry out a wide role providing they remained conscious of the need to avoid pre-determination.

SfE was actually very cost effective – mainly because of reliance on local determination. However, there was a case for looking at introducing a curb on vexatious complaints – he quoted a particular case where the complainant sent a flurry of complaints.

Most complaints [54%] came from members of the public rather than other Members.

Across the country there was a need to raise the competence of Monitoring Officers.

Overall, the system was working well after 1 year. Certain areas could be improved. More emphasis on mediation, flexibility, and proportionate action. He reiterated the need for a mechanism to deal with vexatious cases. It would be good to have more investigations resulting in action rather than no further action. There was a need for more robust actions by Chairmen and Monitoring Officers.

### **Virtual Network**

Sophia Lambert mentioned how the virtual London Standards Committee Chairs Network worked and noted that it had been useful in working out numbers on STCs around London and in circulating the details of the Richmond case currently being appealed against.

The meeting ended around 8.20pm