



Annual Return form - 2010

Authority name Stockton on Tees Borough Council
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PART 1: COMMUNICATION

Annual Report

Does the standards committee produce an annual report?

Yes

What does the report contain?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A personal statement by the standards committee chairman | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Information about the members of the standards committee |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The role of the standards committee | <input type="checkbox"/> The standards committee terms of reference |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Information about the Code of Conduct | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Statistical information about complaints that have been received |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Information about the length of time taken dealing with complaints | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A summary of complaints which have led to investigation, sanction or other action |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Details about training/events provided | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The forward work plan of the standards committee |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other | |

Please describe what "Other" contents are in the report.

Information about:

Local Government Ombudsman

Annual Report and Complaints information

Audit Committee joint working

Constitution - reports on various aspects of the framework

Committee on Standards in Public Life - Reports on the Committee's work

Whistleblowing policy

Details about Council complaints, compliments, commendations and comments

Dispensations

Politically restricted posts

Specific details about these matters are also provided by way of links to reports previously submitted to the Standards Committee.

How is the standards committee annual report circulated?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sent to all senior officers | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sent to all members |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sent to parish/town councils | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Available on the authority intranet |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Available as a specific item on the authority website | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Available in the standards committee papers published on the authority website |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Included as a full authority meeting agenda item | <input type="checkbox"/> Publicised in local press |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distributed to households | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Available at authority offices |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not circulated outside of the standards committee | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other |

The report is "Available as a specific item on the authority website", please provide the web address.

www.stockton.gov.uk

The report is "Available in the standards committee papers published on the authority website", please provide the web address.

www.stockton.gov.uk

Please describe the "Other" circulation methods.

The Annual Report is submitted to the Standards Committee, Audit Committee, Cabinet and Council. The report is presented in public at these meetings and copies are available for inspection at the meeting, or by contacting Democratic Services and/or electronically via the Council's agenda system.

Publicising Complaints

How can the public access information about how to make a complaint against a member?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Through a 'compliments and complaints' type section of the council website | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Through the standards committee section of the website |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complaints leaflets available from the authority | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Included as part of a council newsletter |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advertised through parish councils | <input type="checkbox"/> Information is not available to the public |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other | |

The information is on the "'compliments and complaints' type section of the council website", please provide the web address.

www.stockton.gov.uk

The information is on "standards committee section of the website", please provide the web address.

www.stockton.gov.uk

Please describe the "Other" places the public can access this information.*

Details publicised in Council buildings, libraries, community centres and other external organisations' buildings.

How can the public access information about the outcome of initial assessment decisions?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Written summary available for public inspection | <input type="checkbox"/> All initial assessment decisions are publicised in the local press |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Publicised in the local press only if the subject member agrees | <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment decisions published on the authority website |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Articles published in the authority newsletter | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other |

Please describe the "Other" ways initial assessments are available.

Minuted decisions reported to the Standards Committee and available via the agenda system to the public. Links to the Standards Committee's agendas are provided to Town and Parish Councils before each meeting of the Committee.

How can the public access information about the outcome of investigations?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hearings are open to the public | <input type="checkbox"/> All investigation outcomes are publicised in the local press |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Publicised in the local press only if the subject member agrees | <input type="checkbox"/> Published on the authority website |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Decision notices are available for public inspection | <input type="checkbox"/> Articles in the authority newsletter |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other | |

Please describe the "Other" ways investigation outcomes are available.

Minuted decisions are reported to the Standards Committee and made available via agenda to the general public. Meetings of the Standards Committee Sub-Committee which considers investigation reports have all been held in public. The agendas and reports were therefore made available for public inspection. Minutes of the relevant Sub-Committee are reported to the full Standards Committee as an open agenda item and are therefore available for public inspection, either electronically via agenda or by hard copy from Democratic Services. Where the relevant Sub-Committee agrees with the finding of no failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, and the subject member does not object, a notice is published in the local press and on the Council's website.

Do you have a mechanism in place for measuring the satisfaction of all those involved in allegations of misconduct? For example the member, complainant and witnesses.

No

What does the authority do to promote the work of the standards committee and standards generally to the rest of the authority (i.e. internally)?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dedicated standards committee pages on intranet | <input type="checkbox"/> Standards committee has its own newsletter / bulletin |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Standards committee issues briefing notes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Articles in employee newsletter / bulletin / newspaper |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Standards committee independent members observe other authority meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> Standards committee independent members contribute to other authority meetings |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other | |

Please describe the "Other" methods used.

The Standards Chair meets the Chief Executive on a regular basis. The Chair also meets the Cabinet Member with responsibility for standards and the Leaders of the Council's political Groups including the Leader of the Council. The Chair attends full Council meetings, presents the minutes of the Standards Committee including the Committee's Annual Report and takes any questions. The Standards Committee has a forward plan which is considered at each Committee meeting; also by the Audit Committee and by the Officer Corporate Governance Group. The Standards Committee and the Audit Committee forward plans are compared, each Committee's plan informing the other's, in order to ensure consistency of approach. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee meet the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee every six months to discuss matters of mutual interest. The minutes/outcomes of the meetings are reported to the Standards and Audit Committees.

How can the public access information about your standards committee?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dedicated standards committee section on the authority website | <input type="checkbox"/> Within 'council and democracy' type section of website |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ethical standards issues have been included in the local press / media | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Standards committee minutes, agendas, and reports are available to the public |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Leaflets and/or posters are placed in public buildings | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Places articles in the authority newsletter / bulletin / other publication |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Standards committee meetings are observed by members of the public | <input type="checkbox"/> Information is not available to the public |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other | |

Please provide the web address for the standards committee section on the authority website.

www.stockton.gov.uk

Please describe the "Other" ways the public can access this information.

The Council's Democratic Services Team hosts an annual Local Democracy Week. Information relating to the Standards Committee is displayed at events held during the week. The Council's Libraries have internet access and the public is able to access information on standards on the Council's website.

What else does the authority do to promote the work of the standards committee and standards generally to the public and other partners?

The Council has used its public newspaper (Stockton News) to highlight confidential reporting procedures, code of conduct and local assessment arrangements. Over 70 A3 posts explaining the Code of Conduct complaints process have been distributed for display by Town and parish Councils, Council buildings, Libraries, Community Centres and external organisations. Minutes of all Standards Committee Sub-Committee meetings are publicised on the Council's website via agenda. Some website documents (relating to making complaints) have been amended to provide direct links to other relevant documents. A "Local Assessment of Code of Conduct Complaints" document has been produced to provide a better understanding for all. Information regarding the Standards Committee, Code of Conduct and the Council's local assessment arrangements has been disseminated to third sector organisations in the Authority's area. The Council has established a parish liaison forum which meets quarterly and which considers information and reports which are of interest to Town/Parish Councils in the Stockton Borough area. This includes regular features relating to the Code of Conduct and local assessment.

Awareness about the standards of conduct expected of Councillors and Council Officers, together with awareness of the complaints procedure, has been promoted through a

range of activities, from presentations about the "Be a Councillor" campaign, Town Hall tours to citizenship workshops.

The groups involved included the following:-

Representatives of BME voluntary and community groups

Representatives of voluntary and community groups across the borough

Groups of Learners on the Council's Employment Training Programme aged 16-19

Groups of young people aged 16 & 17 year olds who are not in employment, education or training

Groups of unemployed adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties aged 18-50 who are on an Employability Skills Programme

PART 2: INFLUENCE

How does the standards committee communicate ethical issues to the senior figures within your authority (for example the Chief Executive and Leader of the Authority, Party Leaders)?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Formal meetings between standards committee members and senior figures specifically set up to discuss standards | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Informal discussion on particular standards issues |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Senior figure attendance at standards committee meetings | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Monitoring Officer is a member of or attends Corporate Management Team (or equivalent) meetings |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Executive or senior member has portfolio responsibility for standards | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chair (or other standards committee member) addresses full authority meeting(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

How do the senior figures in your authority demonstrate strong ethical values?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Through a strongly promoted whistle-blowing policy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By ensuring there are references to ethics in the authority vision / objectives |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demonstrating appropriate behaviours | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Senior figure(s) makes personal commitment to standards in statements to public/employees |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Through any other method | |

Describe the "Other" ways that this is achieved.

The Council has developed a partnership toolkit to help all involved in partnership working to set up appropriate structures to manage their partnerships. The governance arrangements for the authority's partnerships are based on the six principals of good governance and the standards expected in public life. The Internal Audit Service reviews these arrangements based on those principles and standards. Any partnership in which the Council is involved must have a nominated link officer, whose responsibilities will include facilitating the Council's input into the partnership and alerting relevant council officers to any issues eg Internal Audit, Conduct etc. Each partnership's details is included on a register maintained by the authority's Procurement Manager. The link officer is responsible for ensuring periodic self assessment health checks of the partnership are undertaken. These health checks are subject to internal audit review.

Does your authority have a protocol for partnership working that outlines the standards of behaviour expected of all those working in partnership?

Yes

What mechanisms does the authority use for dealing with member/officer and/or member/member disputes?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Informal discussion/mediation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Monitoring Officer mediation |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chair of standards committee mediation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Senior figure mediation (e.g. Chief Executive) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advice from Human Resources department | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Solicitor / legal adviser consulted |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Informal hearing | <input type="checkbox"/> No mechanisms other than normal complaints process |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

PART 3: TRAINING AND SUPPORT

Between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010, has the authority assessed the training and development needs of authority members in relation to their responsibilities on standards of conduct?

Yes

If yes, what needs were identified?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Introduction to the Code of Conduct | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Elements of the Code of Conduct |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The role and responsibilities of the standards committee | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethical governance/behaviour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> None | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other |

Describe the "Other" needs that were identified.

Bias and predetermination

What training/support was provided during the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Introduction to the Code of Conduct | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Elements of the Code of Conduct |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Role and responsibilities of the standards committee | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ethical governance/behaviour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> None | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other |

Describe the "Other" training/support provided.

Bias and predetermination

Who received training/support?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Standards committee chair | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Independent members |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other standards committee members | <input type="checkbox"/> All authority members |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Specific authority members with particular needs (e.g. new members, planning committee members) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

What methods were employed to give training/support?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Internal training (presentations/seminars/workshops) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> External trainer/speaker |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> One on one training | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Joint/regional training event |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Online learning | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Guidance notes/briefing materials |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Standards for England materials | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethical governance toolkit |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other | |

Describe the "Other" methods used.

Joint training is provided by the Tees Valley Local Authorities for Standards Committee Members and for Town and Parish Councils. This has involved the use of a Monitoring Officer Peer, Standards for England personnel and Local Councils Association representatives. The training is also supported by the Tees Valley Local Authorities Monitoring Officers.

What other training/support has been provided on areas of an authority member's role or activities they may engage in?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chairing skills | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lobbying |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Predetermination, Predisposition and bias | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Blogging and/or the use of social media |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Electioneering | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Freedom of Information (FOI) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> None | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

In general, how well attended was the training provided?

25-50%

Please give a brief overview of how standards issues are covered in your induction process for new members of the authority?

Induction training covers ethics and standards including the Code of Conduct, corporate governance, Freedom of Information and Members/Officers working relationships. The induction programme is due for a refresh prior to the 2011 elections. The Council has produced a Guide to Member Roles for use in its personal support planning process. The member roles include one for elected members generally which identifies part of the role as compliance with relevant Codes of Conduct. There is also one for Standards Committee Members, part of the role being to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. All Members are offered Personal Support Plans. The new Members' database highlights the role of the Standards Committee to Members.

Specific induction sessions are provided in connection with Employee Appeals, Licensing and Planning. These incorporate ethical governance issues and are internally and externally facilitated.

Refresher training, for example in connection with planning, is also offered. Planning training sessions are provided after Committee meetings.

Joint training is provided by the Tees Valley Local Authorities for Standards Committee members and for Town and Parish Councils.

In which areas of the role and responsibilities of the standards committee has training/support been provided for standards committee members? Please tick all that apply.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Initial assessments | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other action/mediation |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reviews | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Investigations |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hearings | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sanctions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

PART 4: INVESTIGATIONS

Have any investigations been completed during the period 1 April 2009 - 31 March 2010? Yes

How many investigations have been completed during this period?

1

Have any of the investigations used external investigators? No

Of the investigations completed during the period, for how many have external investigators been used?

Nothing selected

Please provide a brief overview of the processes you have in place to ensure the quality of local investigations.

Use of Standards for England guidance and proforma documentation. Investigation reports are produced in draft and final versions, so that the report can be considered by Officers at draft stage.

Review of previous investigations and lessons learned. Regular, continuing oversight of the relevant Investigating Officer by more senior, experienced Officers. A specific investigation timetable and key stage deadlines for reporting to Officers overseeing the process.

Reports are submitted to the Standards Committee on investigation process, outcomes and performance eg in terms of time taken for each stage of the process.

The Tees Valley Local Authorities have joint working and mutual support protocols in place regarding local investigations and determinations.

The Tees Valley Local Authorities Lawyers Group meet regularly to share information and best practice.

PART 5: RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

Has your authority provided training for parish councillors during the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010?

Yes

If yes, what topics did the training cover?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Freedom of Information (FOI) | <input type="checkbox"/> Confidential information |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Lobbying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dual-hatted members | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The Code of Conduct generally |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Personal and prejudicial interests | <input type="checkbox"/> Bullying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

What methods were employed to give training/support?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Internal training (presentations/seminars/workshops) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> External speakers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> One on one training | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Joint/regional event |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Guidance notes/briefing materials | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Standards for England's materials |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CALC speakers | <input type="checkbox"/> Part of wider parish liaison meeting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

In general, how well attended was the training for parish councillors?

50-75% of those invited

Has your authority provided training for parish clerks during the period 1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010?

Yes

What topics did the training for parish clerks cover?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Freedom of Information (FOI) | <input type="checkbox"/> Working with confidential information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Lobbying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dual-hatted members | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The Code of Conduct generally |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Personal and prejudicial interests | <input type="checkbox"/> Bullying |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other | |

What "Other" topics did parish clerks training cover?

Audit requirements and procedures. Monitoring Officer role and extent of powers. Dispensations. Local assessment. Parish Clerk training needs generally.

What methods were employed to give training/support to parish clerks?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> One on one training | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Internal training (presentations/seminars/workshops) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> External speakers | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Guidance notes/briefing materials |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Standards for England's materials | <input type="checkbox"/> Joint authority/regional event |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

In general, how well attended was the training for parish clerks?

25-50%

Does your council have a COMPACT (a formal agreement with your county Association of Local Councils about supporting standards for parish and town councils

in the area)?

No

Describe the relationship between your authority and your County Association of Local Councils in relation to standards. For example, how regularly do you interact with them? Are you involved in delivering joint training?

The Association is invited to training events arranged by the Tees Valley Local Authorities jointly.

Standards for England and Teesside University are currently researching the role of the Parish Liaison Officer. Teesside University have created a brief questionnaire to assess the organisational background, functions and skills needed to carry out the Parish Liaison role. Does your authority have a Parish Liaison Officer?

No

What steps have you taken when dealing with parishes which have had problems with standards issues? For example, what preventative or capacity building work have you done with parishes?

Specific one to one support for Clerks through the Monitoring Officer. Discussions with individual members. Clerks Forum meetings with the Monitoring Officer. Joint/regional training events for Town/Parish Councils.

Which of the following areas would you like Standards for England to produce additional guidance on to support your work with parishes?

Lobbying

Predetermination and bias

Planning and interests

Dual-hatted members

Other

End of form