



THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Melton Borough Council

Promoting high standards within Melton Borough
and its Parish Councils

ANNUAL REPORT – 2009/10

**The Standards Committee of
Melton Borough Council
Annual Report May 2009 – April 2010**

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Foreword by the Chairman

This is the first formal Annual Report of the Standards Committee. The report covers the period May 2009 to April 2010. With the introduction of local assessment on 8 May 2008, this has significantly enhanced the role of local Standards Committees.

The role of the Standards Committee

The main role of the Standards Committee is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct amongst the 28 Members of the Borough Council and approximately 100 members of 26 Parish Councils in the borough.

The Standards Committee is currently responsible for the following main activities:

- Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by borough Councillors, Parish Councillors and co-opted members
- Ensuring members are trained to carry out their duties effectively
- Advising on the Members' Code of Conduct and protocols
- Monitoring the operation of the Code of Conduct
- Dealing with the local assessment of complaints
- Conducting local hearings and determination of sanctions should a breach of the code of Conduct be found
- Monitoring performance
- Making returns to Standards for England
- Overview of Council complaints
- Dealing with dispensations
- Oversight of the Council's Constitution
- Oversight of the Council's Anti Fraud Strategy
- Overview of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy

The Committee was, prior to 2008, responsible for hearing complaints which had been referred to it by the Standards Board for England. However, from 8 May 2008 the Standards Committee became responsible for receiving all complaints about alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct made against members of Melton Borough Council and Parish Councillors within the Melton Borough. There is an initial assessment stage when a Standards Assessment Sub Committee made up from members of the Standards Committee meets to consider whether the complaint relates to a local member, if it discloses a potential breach of the Code of Conduct and if it does, whether it ought to be investigated or dealt with by other means such as mediation or training. Some decisions can be appealed by the complainant and if an appeal is made, this will be considered by the Standards Review Sub Committee made up from different members of the Committee.

If a complaint is referred for Investigation, the Monitoring Officer appoints an independent investigating officer, who produces a report for the Assessment Sub Committee. This Sub Committee determines whether they support the findings of the investigation, either that no breach of the code has been found or that it is a minor breach, which does not warrant any further action. If a complaint has been investigated and a breach of the Code is disclosed then the Standards Sub committee (Hearing) will meet to hear evidence and representations and to determine if there has been a breach of the Code of conduct and if so what sanctions are appropriate.

Members of the Committee

The Standards Committee is composed of four Independent Members, four Borough Councillors and four Parish Council Members.

Independents	Councillors	Parish Councillors
Mr A Hand	P Chandler	Hon Alderman A M Dames
Mr A Hockey	C O Chapman	Mr P Holbrook
Mr M J Mayes	S Dungworth	Mr R A Putnam
Ms T Pritchard	E Holmes	Mr J Machin (additional nominee)

Officers who Support the Committee

The Standards Committee and Sub Committees are supported by the Monitoring Officer (Christine Marshall – Corporate Director) and the Deputy Monitoring Officer (Verina Wenham – Head of Legal Services).

The Democratic Services Team services the Committee and makes arrangements for the distribution of agendas, reports and minutes of the Standards Committee and Sub Committee meetings.

The Monitoring Officer:

Under the provisions of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, Councils have a duty to appoint a Monitoring Officer to ensure the lawfulness and fairness of Council decision making. The Monitoring Officer effectively serves as the guardian of the Council's Constitution and the decision-making process.

The Monitoring Officer also works closely with the Council's Standards Committee to assist it in its role of promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct amongst members of the borough Council and members of Parish Councils in the Borough.

The Monitoring Officer is responsible for establishing and maintaining the register of members' interests.

The Monitoring Officer is the main advisor to the Standards Committee. She is responsible for ensuring the decisions of the Standards Committee are implemented. If the Standards Committee refers an allegation for investigation, the Monitoring Officer will arrange for it to be investigated.

The Monitoring Officer is also the main point of contact with Standards for England and submits quarterly/annual returns on the complaints received and dealt with by the Standards Committee.

Meetings of the Standards Committee May 2009-April 2010

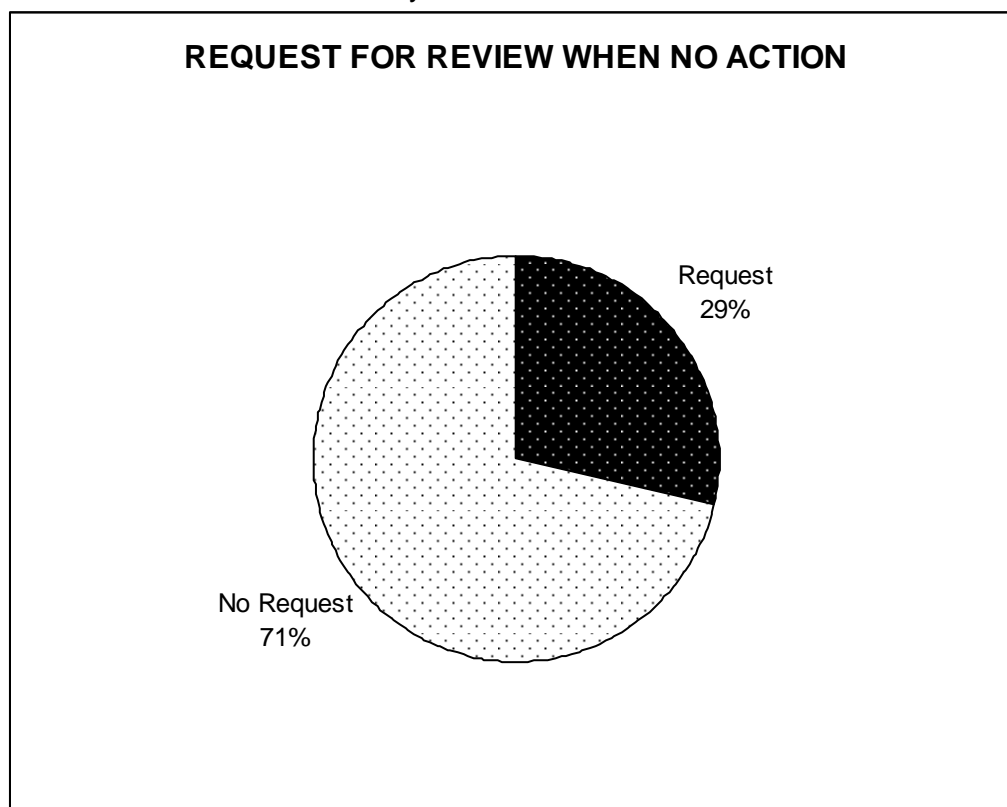
During this period, we were considerably busier than anticipated. A summary of meetings held is as follows:

Standards Committee	4
Assessment Sub-Committee	7
Review Sub-Committee	2
Assessment (Consideration) Sub-Committee	0
Hearing Sub-Committee	0

Complaints Statistics May 2009 – April 2010

Total number of complaints received May 2009 – April 2010 = 7
Of which

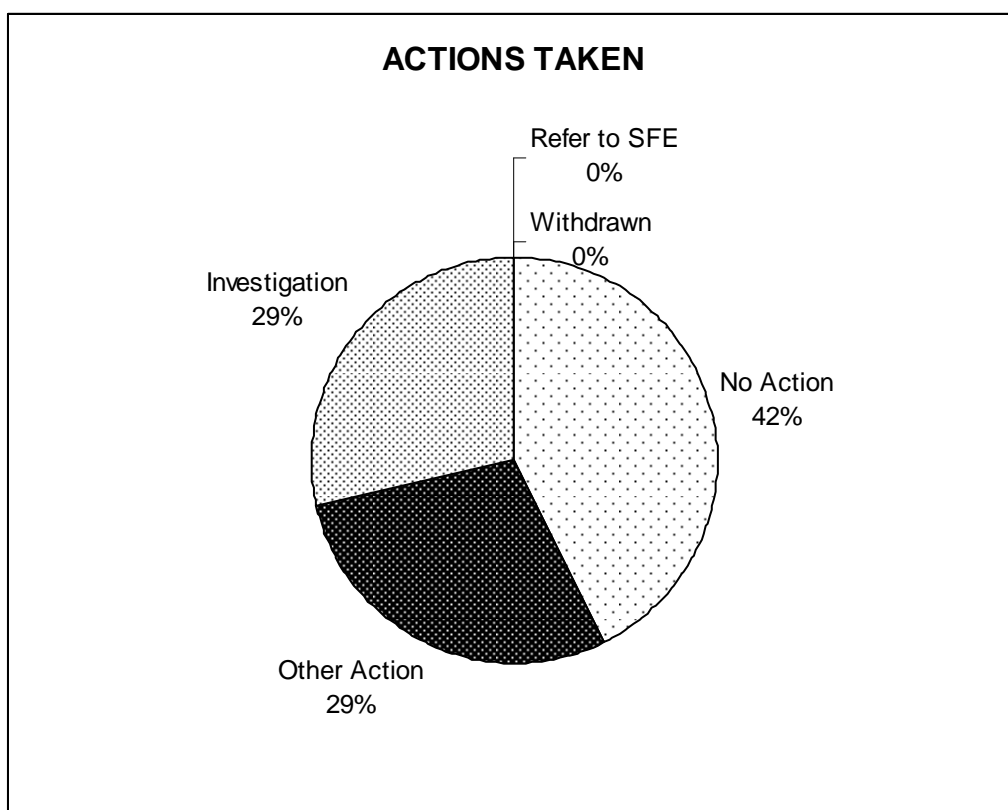
- 7 were considered by an Assessment Sub Committee
- 2 were considered by a Review Sub Committee



- 0 concerned the actions of a Parish Councillor only
- 7 concerned the actions of a Borough Councillor only
- 0 concerned the actions of a Borough & Parish Councillor combined

Actions Taken

- 0 complaints were withdrawn
- 3 were considered to warrant No Further Action
- 2 were referred for Other Action by the Monitoring/Deputy Monitoring Officer
- 2 were referred for investigation (2 investigations are continuing)
- 0 were referred to Standards for England



Who makes the Complaint?

100% of the complaints received were from members of the public.

The Work of the Standards Committee May 2009 – April 2010

1. Local Assessment of Complaints

The arrival of local assessment on 8 May 2008 saw the transfer of functions from the Standards Board for England to the local level. From that date all complaints about the conduct of councillors have to be submitted to the local Standards Committee.

In preparation for the transfer of these new duties we have had to set up separate Standards Sub Committees. Although the new structure may be viewed as bureaucratic one clear advantage is that members have had the opportunity to see the different elements of the standards agenda at work.

In preparation for local assessment we have had to ensure that members were suitably trained to carry out this new work that we had proper written procedures in place. A special toolkit was established to support us in this work. With all complaints having to be in writing we have established a page on the Council's website giving advice on how to make a complaint. On this site members of the public can download complaint forms and other useful information including "how to make a complaint". We understand that not everyone has access to the website and therefore we can provide paper copies on request and help, if necessary, for the form to be completed.

With a national target of 20 working days to deal with local assessment cases, our average to date is within this. We are however below average in the time taken to progress investigations and this is now a focus of the Monitoring Officer to improve those statistics.

2. Register of Members' Interests

Members must tell the Monitoring Officer in writing within 28 days of taking office or within 28 days of any change to their register of interests, of any interests which fall within the categories set out in the Code of Conduct.

In accordance with best practice, all Borough Councillors are invited annually to review their registrations. Parish Clerks are asked to place an item on their parish council agenda each year reminding members to do the same. The registrations are available to view on request by any Member or member of the public and consideration is currently being given to the registers being displayed on the Council's website.

3. Training

Rather than simply focus on standards training provided during the year we thought it would be sensible to list all the key training given to members during the year to increase their understanding of Council business generally by working with the countywide Member Development network.

Date	Training/Development Event
27 March	Community Leadership Seminar
21 May	Code of Conduct after the Development Committee meeting for Members of the Development Committee.
22 May	Licensing Training
22 June	Treasury Management
July	LGA Annual Conference
30 July	Dealing with the Media
4-6 Sept	Planning School
Sept	Leadership Academy – 3 Module Programme – Sept onwards
Sept	LGA Rural Conference
2 Sept	Perfect Storm - Managing in the current financial climate
10 Sept	Working in Partnership
24 Sept	The Art of Being Brilliant
30 Sept	Risk Management
20 Oct	Standards - Complaints
5 Nov	Local Leadership Conference - 21 st Century Councillor
23 Nov	Chairing skills
25 Nov	LGA Improvement & Innovation Conference
14 Jan	121 Planning Update for sitting on Dev Cttee
27 Jan	Workshop on Lean Management
2 Feb	Standards
4 Feb	Bias and pre determination for sitting on Development Committee
25 Feb	Ageing Population 2010
3 March	A Guide to Local Government Finance
15 March	Laptop Training and accessing Council information (2 sessions – 2 nd session on 22 March)
18 March	E Participation
23 March	Teenage Pregnancy
23 March	Standards Training – Code of Conduct/Complaints etc.
22 March	Laptop Training and accessing Council information
25 March	Licensing/Gambling Act/Taxi Licensing Training
30-31 March	Culture, Tourism and Sport Conference

4. Dispensations

None

5. Constitution

The Monitoring Officer in conjunction with the Democratic Services team, Overview and Scrutiny and Constitution Working Group have reviewed the constitution and this was approved on 21 April 2010 by Full Council.

6. Review of Policies and Procedures

The Monitoring Officer and as necessary the Standards Committee reviews all policies and procedures relating to ethical standards and various codes, policies and protocols.

- A revised Members' Code of Conduct is awaited from central government but Standards for England have recently advised that the proposed revisions will not be laid during this Parliamentary session.
- The Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and Strategy has been recently renewed and specific action has been taken to increase awareness amongst staff in strengthening pro-active anti-fraud measures.
- The Whistle Blowing Policy has recently been reviewed.
- Ethical Framework Summary – this document was specifically created to bring together for training purposes the overarching framework for Ethical Standards and which has then been rolled out to all staff in the form of a presentation.

7. Parish Support

This is an area of particular focus for 2010/11.

Draft Forward Work Programme 2010/11 – 2011/12

1. Local assessment of complaints and reviews
2. Consider and determine applications for dispensations, as appropriate
3. Preparation of Annual Report for presentation to the Full Council
4. Review of the introduction of local assessment and associated procedures including dealing with the media and publicity generally
5. Annual Review of the Ombudsman report
6. Appointment and training of independent Members – 2010/11 and 2011/12
7. Complete quarterly statistics and annual return to Standards for England
8. Review of policies, procedures, constitution as appropriate
9. Other matters as determined by the Committee during the course of the year

Contacts

For further information about the role of the Standards Committee or standards issues in general, please contact either of the following:

<p>Christine Marshall Monitoring Officer Melton Borough Council Phoenix House Nottingham Road Melton Mowbray Leicestershire LE13 0UL 01664 502532 cmarshall@melton.gov.uk</p>	<p>Verina Wenham Deputy Monitoring Officer Melton Borough Council Phoenix House Nottingham Road Melton Mowbray Leicestershire LE13 0UL 01664 502490 vwenham@melton.gov.uk</p>
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