

Annual Return Form - 2009

Authority name: Sevenoaks District Council
Authority type: District Council
Region: South East
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Section 1: terms of reference

1.1: Does the standards committee have Terms of Reference?

Yes

1.2: How is help provided to members on following the Code of Conduct?

The Standards Committee has an extensive training programme with regular training workshops. The training has been undertaken by the Monitoring Officer and various Members of the Standards Committee. Specialist training across Kent has taken place. Training is monitored.

1.3(a) : Does the standards committee have a forward work plan?

Yes

1.3(b): If yes, Who outside the standards committee is involved in agreeing the forward work plan?

We have key on-going areas of work such as training, local assessment of complaints, complaint monitoring. It is the intention to develop further a work programme for the coming year with suggestions being discussed with the Chief Executive, Chief Financial Officer and Leader of the Council.

1.4(a): Is the standards committee given a role in reviewing amendments to the authority's Constitution (or standing orders where appropriate)?

No

1.4(b): If yes, When was the last review undertaken, and what was the Standards Committee's role in the review?

1.5: Standards Committee meetings

Please indicate in the boxes below how many times between 01/04/2008 and 31/03/2009 the standards committee has met and for what reasons.

General meetings of whole standards committee	2
Training	20
Assessment subcommittee meetings	2
Review subcommittee	0
Consideration meeting	1
Hearings	1

Section 2: the Standards Committee's Annual Report

2.1(a): Does the standards committee produce an annual report on its own work?

Yes

2.1(b): If yes at 2.1(a), is the Annual Report received by a meeting of the full authority?

Yes

2.1(c): If yes at 2.1(a), is the Annual Report sent to all members of the authority?

Yes

2.1(d): If yes at 2.1(a), is the Annual Report sent to all senior officers?

Yes

2.1(e): If yes at 2.1(a), how is the Annual Report publicised to the general public?

The Annual Report is entitled "Report of the Monitoring Officer" and can be accessed by the public via the Council's website. It is presented to full Council by the Chair of the Standards Committee.

Section 3: the Standards Committee - Promoting Standards

3.1: What else does the Standards Committee do to communicate the role of the Standards Committee internally within the authority?

Training workshops for members and officers.
Training manual has been developed.
The Monitoring Officer's Report sets out the Committee's work during the year.
A Standards Bulletin is now being produced.

3.2: What else has the standards committee done to promote confidence in local democracy to the wider public?

Protocols and Procedures have been developed and published.
Advertising has taken place in respect of the new Member complaint procedures.
All Reports of the Standards Committee can be accessed by the public via the Council's website.

3.3(a): Has the authority, or the standards committee in particular, considered how it will monitor and ensure high standards of behaviour when the authority is working in partnership with other organisations?

Yes

3.3(b): If yes, please provide examples

The authority has developed a Partnership Register and also a Partnership Toolkit.
Regular meetings take place with our Partner organisations.

Section 4: the Standards Committee - Training

4.1(a): Between 01/04/2008 and 31/03/2009, has the authority assessed the training and development needs of members in relation to their responsibilities on standards of conduct?

Yes

4.1(b): If yes, what training needs were identified?

Training on the Code of Conduct.
The introduction of the local assessment of Member complaints and review process.
General Training on Standards and Ethics

4.2: Please provide a list of training and development opportunities that have been provided to members and officers in the period from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009, that are relevant to ensuring high standards. Your list should include any training that relates to the operation of the local standards framework eg local assessment and hearings.

Member Development Training provided by The Members Development Group working across Kent & Medway. Training on the Code of Conduct. Standards and Ethics Workshops. Training sessions on assessing and reviewing Member Complaints.

Section 5: Leadership

5.1(a): How often has the standards committee, or its chair, met the chief executive to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009)?

Once

5.1(b): Please also provide an overview of what these meetings were about

The meeting was with the Chair of Standards, the three Statutory Officers of the Council and the Leader of the Council.

Discussion took place on the Terms of Reference of the Standards Committee and the possibility of a wider role.

5.2(a): How often has the standards committee, or its chair, met the leader of the council to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009)?

Once

5.2(b): Please also provide an overview of what these meetings were about

Please see above. Discussions also centred on the Ethical Health of the organisation generally. The meeting with the Chair of Standards, the three statutory officers and the Leader takes place every six months.

5.3(a): How often has the standards committee, or its chair, met the other party group leaders to discuss ethical issues in the last 12 months (from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009)?

None

5.3(b): Please also provide an overview of what these meetings were about

The Standards Committee now has an Opposition Leader as one of its Members and such Leader has discussed ethical issues with the Chair following the close of a recent Standards Committee meeting.

5.4: Does the standards committee, or its chair, have regular access to the monitoring officer? How regular?

Yes. The Monitoring Officer employs an open door policy for all Members of the Committee as well as all Parish/Town Clerks and all Members of District, Parish/Town Councils.

5.5: How many times from 01/04/2008 to 31/03/2009 has the standards committee chair been invited to address a full authority meeting?

Once

5.6(a): Does the monitoring officer sit on the corporate management team?

No

5.6(b): If no, describe in what ways, if any, the monitoring officer has access to the corporate management team

The Monitoring Officer has the ability to put items on the Agenda and thus attend for the discussion of such items.

The Monitoring Officer may be invited to attend in respect of a particular item on the Agenda.

The Monitoring Officer may be asked to cover for a Director.

5.7: Has an executive member (or senior member where appropriate) been given portfolio responsibility for standards?

Yes

Section 6: Complaints

6.1: Can the public access information, from the authority website, about how to make a complaint against a member?

Yes

6.2: What else has the authority done to advertise the complaint process on member conduct to the general public?

Public Notices have been published.
Various editions of The Council's "In-Shape" publication has advertised the complaint process to staff, residents and businesses.
A Training session took place at the local Town Forum.

6.3: Has the authority sought feedback from any of those people involved in an allegation of member misconduct about their satisfaction with the member conduct complaint process?

For example has the authority sought feedback from the complainant, witnesses or person against whom the allegation was made?

No, have not sought feedback

6.4(a): Where they have been undertaken, how does the authority communicate the outcome of investigations into member misconduct to members?

Reports to the Standards Committee accessible via Council's website. The Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer delivered to Full Council by the Chair of the Standards Committee. All such meetings generally take place in public. Press Releases where the regulations permit.

6.4(b): Where they have been undertaken, how does the authority communicate the outcome of investigations into member misconduct to officers?

All the above reports can be accessed by Officers via the Council's intranet and website. Determination Hearings are generally held in public. Press Releases where the regulations permit.

6.4(c): Where they have been undertaken, how does the authority communicate the outcome of investigations into member misconduct to the general public?

All the above reports can be accessed by Members of the Public via the Council's website. Determination Hearings are generally held in public. Press Releases where the regulations allow.

6.5(a): Where they have been undertaken, how does the authority communicate the outcome of allegations that have not resulted in an investigation to members?

Minutes of the Meeting and Decision Notices (forming part of a Public Register).
Reports to the Standards Committee.
The Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer delivered to Full Council by the Chair of the Standards Committee.

6.5(b): Where they have been undertaken, how does the authority communicate the outcome of allegations that have not resulted in an investigation to officers?

As set out in a) above.

Such information can be accessed via the Council's intranet system and the Council's website.

6.5(c): Where they have been undertaken, how does the authority communicate the outcome of allegations that have not resulted in an investigation to the general public?

As set out in a) above.

Such information can be accessed via the Council's website.

Section 7: Member-officer relations

7.1(a): Does the authority have a protocol for relations between members and officers?

Yes

7.1(b): If yes, how is the protocol communicated to officers and members?

It forms part of the Constitution. It forms part of the Induction Pack for new staff and forms part of the Induction Pact for new Members.

7.1(c): If yes, what is the mechanism for reviewing the effectiveness of this protocol?

Responsibility and the operation of the Protocol lies with the Chief Executive.

7.2: Does the authority include training on the importance of high standards of behaviour in the inductions of new members and officers?

Yes

7.3(a): Does the authority have informal mechanisms for dealing with member/officer and member/member disputes?

Yes

7.3(b): Please provide details of any mechanisms and, if possible, provide an example where this has been used.

The three Statutory Officers meet to discuss potential disputes that may be resolved informally and on occasion the Chief Executive has spoken, with the Leader's authority, to the Member and/or Officer involved. An example of this resulted in a Member giving an apology to a Planning Officer.

Section 8: Registering Member Interests

8.1(a): Is the member register of interests accessible to the public on the authority website?

No

8.1(b): If no, please briefly explain whether there is any particular reason why not.

At the moment information is given on the Council's website on how to access the Member Register of Interests and when each Member last updated their Register of Interests. There are plans to make the Register publically available on the Council's website.

8.2: Is the register of gifts and hospitality accessible to the public on the authority website?

No

8.3: What does the authority do to signal to members the importance of declaring interests and completing the register of interests and the register of gifts and hospitality?

Regular training workshops cover such matters. Those who attend the training workshops are given a Training Manual that covers such matters. There is a Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality set out in the Council's Constitution. Bulletin Report on the Register of Members' Interests.

Section 9: Officer Conduct

9.1: Does the authority have a code of conduct for senior officers?

Yes

9.2(a): Does the authority compile a register of senior officers' interests?

Yes

9.2(b): If yes, is the register of senior officers' interests available to the public on the authority website?

No. Information is given on the Council's website on how to access officer's interests.

9.3(a): Does the authority compile a register of senior officers' gifts and hospitality?

Yes

9.3(b): If yes, is the senior officers' register of gifts and hospitality available to the public on the authority website?

No

Section 10: Optional Questions

The following questions are optional; you do not have to complete them if you do not wish to. However, this information would be useful to us in helping us to raise ethical standards.

10.1: On what issues, if any, would you appreciate more support or guidance on from the Standards Board for England?

The Monitoring Officer Helpline is appreciated as a rapid response is often required.

10.2(a): The Standards Board for England, the Improvement and Development Agency and the Audit Commission have developed a toolkit that authorities can use to assess the ethical governance arrangements in their authority, and also to identify improvements.

Has your authority used the ethical governance toolkit?

No

10.2(b): If no, has your authority considered using the ethical governance toolkit?

Yes

10.3: Expand on response to the above question

End of questions
