

## **COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE – ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16**

Officer contact: Julie Openshaw District Solicitor and Monitoring Officer:  
[julie.openshaw@wycombe.gov.uk](mailto:julie.openshaw@wycombe.gov.uk) Tel: 01494 421252

Wards affected: All

### **PROPOSED DECISION**

That the report be noted.

#### **Corporate Implications**

The Standards Committee's terms of reference include upholding standards of conduct for Members of the Council. Awareness of the work of other bodies which have similar objectives will help the Standards Committee in its work and all Council members in their roles as representatives of their local communities.

#### **Executive Summary**

This report draws Members' attention to the Annual Report 2015-16 of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) and its work programme for the forthcoming year.

#### **Sustainable Community Strategy/Council Priorities - Implications**

This report helps support the Council's Corporate Plan by supporting its values and ensuring its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards.

#### **Background and Issues**

In June 2016, the CSPL's most recent Newsletter and issues raised by it were reported to the Standards Committee. The CSPL has now published its Annual Report for 2015-16 summarising its work over the past year and its work plan for the forthcoming year. The full document can be found at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/543819/CSPL%20Annual%20Report%202015-2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/543819/CSPL%20Annual%20Report%202015-2015.pdf)

Members will recall that the self-assessment on ethical standards for providers of public services, a piece of work that was carried out by officers and both Standards and Audit Committee in June, also originated from a recommendation made by the CSPL that public service authorities should self-assess their compliance with a number of expected measures. Maintaining regular awareness of the CSPL's work is a useful tool in monitoring good practice in maintaining standards.

Following appointment of a new member to the CSPL reported in June, two further new appointments have since been made, i.e. Jane Ramsey and Dr Jane Martin, following an open competition for the roles. Ms Ramsey, who is Chair of Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and a background serving on the Council or the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, the Department of Health Audit and Risk Committee, a Housing Association and in local government, took up the post on 1

September for a 5 year term. Dr Martin, who will take up the post from 1 January, has been Chair of the Commission for Local Administration in England and previously the Local Government Ombudsman and Vice-chair of the Commission for Local Administration in England.

The Annual report includes an overview of the CSPL's activities in 2015-16, which are summarised below.

- With regard to its review of Ethics for Regulators, the CSPL's initial aim was to undertake a health check of how regulators manage ethical issues in their own organisations. The range of issues encountered and quality of research exceeded initial expectations so the scope of the project was broadened into a full report and command paper. The project received responses from over 60 regulators, and 26 visits to regulators were undertaken, with further research undertaken. Whilst the Committee aimed to publish its findings in September 2016 this appears to be pending, and recommendations are awaited.
- The online guide for public services providers which was completed by the Council in June had a significant impact with 2750 online views since December. The CSPL confirms its commitment to make the case for public service providers to take steps to embed ethical practices and culture within their organisations, and remains committed to providing research and guidance for this purpose.
- On Police Accountability, having published its final report in June 2015, whilst generally showing people were happy with police conduct and accountability, questions were raised about lack of clarity on who to complain to about local policing problems and lack of a say on how police spend time and budgets, so letters were sent to all Chief Constables, Chairs of Police and Crime Panels, Police and Crime Commissioners and representative organisations. The closing date is 29 November and 57 stakeholders have responded to date.
- Prior to the Police and Crime Commissioner elections, all candidates were asked in March 2016 to sign up to the ethical standards checklist. Over 50% had done so by the 5 May elections, and afterwards, the CSPL wrote to the Police and Crime Panels reminding them of the recommendations in last year's policing report.
- The Government responded in October 2015 to the CSPL's report Strengthening Transparency around Lobbying (published in November 2014) and in doing so Government offered its assurance that transparency around lobbying is a key priority and accepted a number of recommendations seen as important by the CSPL.
- Following earlier work on the Trade Union Bill this is in the CSPL's forward plan.
- A review of the offence of Misconduct in Public Office began in January 2016, following earlier review in a 1997 paper. Lord Bew began the review speaking at the Commission's Symposium on 20 January. Whilst it has been acknowledged that the situation had moved on since 1997, with the introduction of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Bribery Act 2010 the Committee maintains the position that there is a need to have sanctions in

place if standards are not met, and defining clear and principled consequences of any material failure would support the rebuilding and sustaining of public trust in office. The Committee strongly encourages the discussion of sanctions and consequences in the event of any transgression.

- On the MPs' Code of Conduct, the Committee has highlighted the strengths of the Code whilst suggesting it remains open to improvement and supporting the suggestion that the Parliamentary Commissioner be given more power to investigate breach of the Nolan Principles.
- A review of the Public Appointments Process led by Sir Gerry Grimstone was published on 11 March 2016. Its proposals on improving transparency of the public appointment process were welcomed by the CSPL although unease was expressed about the cumulative effect of other suggested changes. The CSPL notes the Government will be seeking further views and expects to contribute further.
- A key standards area monitored by the CSPL is local government standards, and in its 2014/15 Annual report it agreed to maintain a watching brief on the need for a mandatory code of conduct, strong local leadership, effective independent persons and concern at the lack of sanctions. Whilst there is some evidence to suggest the independent person role is generally well received and vexations complaints are falling, the effectiveness of the sanctions regime is still a concern. The CSPL will continue to liaise with stakeholders on the way in which ethical standards can effectively be embedded in all parts of local government.

The following areas of interest have been identified for the 2016-17 Forward Plan:

- Operation of Referenda;
- Ethical Standards for Providers of Public Services;
- Local Government – work to clarify topics of substantive concern, research underlying causes and identify best practice in well-governed authorities;
- Party Funding.

## **Options**

There are no options.

## **Conclusions**

Access to publications by the CSPL will support the Committee's work to uphold good standards of conduct by drawing attention to areas of work that the CSPL is highlighting and which affect wider standards and ethics.

## **Next Steps**

Future reports will be presented to Standards Committee.

## **Background Papers**

None.