

## IMPROVING STANDARDS

I write to inform you of the Presentation I attended on the 7<sup>th</sup> May. Delegates were offered a warm welcome by Mr Eric Richards, Chair of North Tyneside Standards Committee. This was endorsed by the Chief Executive of the Council.

David Laverick, President of the Adjudication Panel for England, was the first to speak on the following points:

- The role of the Adjudication Panel.

To hear potentially 2 Stages of appeals - First tier Appeal followed by the right to an Upper Tribunal, both following a decision made by a local Standards Committee. Out of 16 Appeals last year 13 were granted a hearing - 2 of the 13 resulted in a variation of sanction - 5 of the 13 were found not to have breached the Code at all. This year around 1 or 2 applications to appeal are coming in on a weekly basis, with 75% of those being given credence. This is compared to around 50% from the previous year. He asked if Standards Committees could reduce the percentage? These points were discussed.

- Membership of Committees. (real or apparent bias?)
- Failure to deal with Submissions from the Appellant.
- Lack of sufficient factual findings.
- Official Conduct v Personal Conduct.
- Human Rights Act (Article 10 - Freedom of Expression).

I personally found the human rights section interesting. The Code needs to be interpreted in a way that gives effect to Article 10. It was emphasised, expressions of political opinion carry a high level of protection.

During the break I had an opportunity to discuss with David Laverick about the possibility of the Adjudication Panel issuing a set of Guidelines similar to those used in the Courts, depicting various different types of breaches coupled with definitions of activity and a suggestion for an appropriate sanction. I thought this would reduce the number of appeals requested. He did not think the option was viable.

I found him very approachable and recommend a quick look at their web site.  
[www.adjudicationpanel.tribunals.gov.uk](http://www.adjudicationpanel.tribunals.gov.uk)

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What Makes a Local Standards Committee effective?

The roles a Standards Committee performs:

- Member training
- Whistleblowing
- Audit
- Ombudsmen
- Member/Officer protocol
- Constitution
- Anti-fraud and Employment disciplinary.

Potential benefits for Standards Committees (in the ideal world):

- Embed the Standards Committee within the Authority
- Friend not foe
- Strong leadership role
- Recognition from Members and Officers
- More responsive to change (e.g. Last years white paper.)

The presentation covered a wide range of the various different styles of management by Standards Committees in many types of Council. He also spoke on the Nation Standards Committee awards that I believe Rutland Council won last year. He suggested maybe more Councils should push for the award thus improving standards overall. Following the results of national surveys going back several years, these areas have been identified as good practice:

- Recruitment and retention
- Managing Group Dynamics
- Developing new roles
- Developing a Public Profile. (Arranging Joint events for Standards Committees, Engagement with Schools, Creating a Web-presence).
- Involving Members
- Relationship with the media
- Organisation learning

I hope I have captured the flavour of the meeting amongst a backdrop of intense, in-depth discussion of a relatively new subject matter. It may be an idea to consider hosting a similar event in the future. The event was well supported by all neighbouring Standards Committee Members and Councillors. I was the only representative from Sunderland. In the future if we are to move to an information sharing and learning committee we may need to reach out.

The meeting closed at 17:30.

I hope this is useful to you.

Colin Stewart JP.