

To All Council Members
Town Hall

Dear Member,

August 2009

Standards Committee – priorities and activities

I wrote a short note to you this time last year on my appointment as Chair of the Standards Committee, and am doing so again following my recent re-appointment.

I trust you are now familiar with the Code of Conduct and the changes to the arrangements for complaints made about councillors' behaviour. If you are not please seek advice from your whip or the Monitoring Officer, and if you feel you require any support or clarification on the issue this is available to you individually or through traditional training sessions.

I am pleased to say that in the first year of the new arrangements the council received only four complaints none of which were assessed as warranting any form of investigation or sanction. Some of these were made by councillors, and whilst not in any way wishing to deter appropriate complaints I would remind you that our terms of reference require us to dismiss petty or vexatious ones, and I therefore urge you to discuss any potential complaint concerning a fellow member with your whip and or the Monitoring Officer first, as once lodged an expensive and time consuming process commences, the resources for which could be better spent in the interests of Southwark residents. With an election coming within a year the potential for such actions increases, and it is not something the committee would wish to see.

Over the next year I am keen to meet with Group Leaders, the Chief Executive, and other senior officers to ensure that high standards of governance are firmly embedded in all aspects of the council's work. To that end I have asked officers to look at ways we can communicate that principle to the people of Southwark, and I aim to start by bringing together all these elements on a specific area of the council's website.

We await the next Audit Commission annual report on the council's ethical governance performance. I am optimistic that it will show improvements, and will ensure that you are informed about the results when they are published.

Your Standards Committee is currently working with the Civic Association on the arrangements for future Civic Awards. This has not been without pain but the committee was unanimous in its view that the long established *modus operandi* did not sit comfortably with the robust and transparent framework in which such an initiative must operate in a modern society. My thanks go to those members who took a constructive approach during the review meetings, and the independent member who is taking this forward on behalf of the committee. My full expectation is that in the autumn the Standards Committee will approve proposals for reform from the Civic Association that will enable this historic initiative to become even more respected and valued in the years ahead.

All the members of the Standards Committee work to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and with your understanding and support we can raise public confidence in the council and the people they elect to represent them.

I hope you find this short update useful and would welcome any thoughts or ideas you may have that will help Southwark continue to improve its performance in this area.

Yours faithfully



MARK L ROELOFSEN
Chair, Standards Committee