



Standards Committee

AGENDA ITEM: 7

Title: Review of Standards Board for England Actions

Date: 17 October 2005

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Electoral Divisions Affected: All

Summary

The purpose of the report is to keep Members informed about the work of the Standards Board for England

Recommendation

That the Committee note the information contained within the report and any implications for the Authority

The Standards Board for England aims to help build confidence in local democracy. They do so by promoting the ethical behaviour of members and co-opted members who serve on a range of authorities through receiving and investigating allegations that members may have breached the Code of Conduct.

Recommendations Following the Review of the Code of Conduct

Members will be interested to know that the Standards Board for England delivered its recommendations for the review of the Code of Conduct to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 5 September 2005, following a four-month consultation period.

The main recommendations were:

- The Code of Conduct should be simpler, more enabling, and owned by the members it applies to.
- The Code needs to empower members as community advocates to take the lead on issues where their expertise is greatest and speak out on behalf of their own communities.
- The rules around personal and prejudicial interests should be clearer, especially for members who sit on more than one public body.

- There needs to be greater clarity about when it is appropriate for things to be confidential. Members must be able to speak out when it is in the public interest.
- Members are entitled to have a private life, and the public only expect this to be regulated where behaviour outside official duties damages the reputation of local government.
- Members have a right to challenge poor performance and criticise officers fairly, but bullying cannot be tolerated and needs to be addressed more explicitly in the Code.
- While people making complaints must be free from intimidation, the current duty for members to report breaches is unnecessary, unhelpful and should be removed.

Sir Anthony Holland, chair of the Standards Board for England is reported to have said that he wants a new and improved Code which places greater emphasis on promoting effective and accountable local governance.

Recent Case

Details of a recent case completed by the Standards Board is included below. The case was determined by the Adjudication Panel for England.

Former councillor Christine Roderick of Ravenfield Parish Council had been disqualified for four years from being or becoming a councillor at a hearing of the independent Adjudication Panel for England (13 September 2005). The ban followed an investigation by the Standards Board for England into allegations that Mrs Roderick breached the councillors' Code of Conduct.

The Board investigated allegations that when Mrs Roderick was chairperson of the council she cancelled meetings without sufficient justification; authorised refurbishment of the parish hall without the consent of the council; made various payments in excess of £50,000 without authorisation from the council; and was involved in improperly securing a loan for the council which resulted in the authority being left in debt.

The Adjudication Panel for England concluded that Mrs Roderick prevented other members from accessing information that they were legally entitled to in regards to the financial dealings of the council and brought her office into disrepute through her actions. It found that due to the persistent nature of Mrs Roderick's failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, a four-year ban was appropriate.

Statistics

The Standards Board for England's website <http://www.standardsboard.co.uk/> contains detailed statistical information concerning the number and type of allegations made against Members regarding alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct. A snapshot of this information has been included overleaf, for members information.

Diagram 1 - Nature of allegations referred for investigation

Cumulative from April 2005

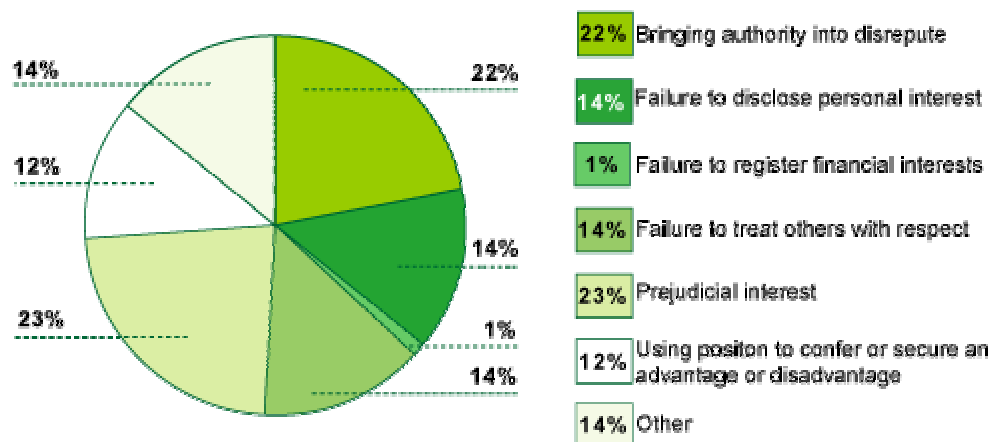


Diagram 2 - Completed cases by final findings

Cumulative from April 2005

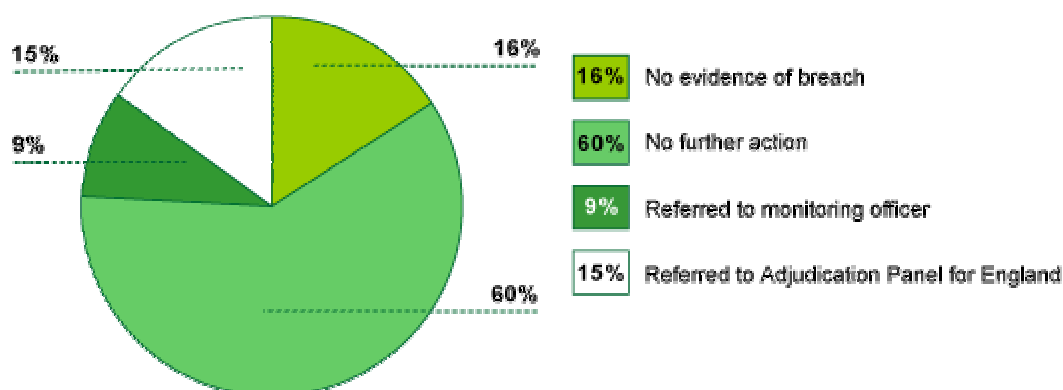


Diagram 3 - Percentage of allegations referred for investigation

Cumulative from April 2005

