

Paul Hawthorne
The Committee on Standards In Pubic Life

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Your Ref: 12th Inquiry
Our Ref: L3/GS53/ADCP/DC.36
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Dear Mr Hawthorne

12th INQUIRY

I am pleased to report that the Standards Committee of South Gloucestershire Council considered the Issues and Questions paper at its last committee meeting.

The Committee looked in particular at the issues raised in para 2.8 of the report and the questions as to whether a Standards Committee has a role in promoting openness and accountability in local government and if so what should it be?

The Committees' considered view is that Standards Committees do have an important role to play in ensuring openness and accountability. They highlighted the following issues as examples of how they already contribute to openness and accountability

- 1 the current local complaints procedure as a way of achieving this. It recognised that the complaints operated at local level can be open to abuse, the operation of a robust and workable local complaints procedure that takes account of local conditions can hold local politicians to account for their behaviour;
- 2 The development of strong working relationships with senior officers, e.g. the Chief Executive and senior politicians, e.g. the leader is an effective way of raising the profile of the Standards Committee and issues relating to the Code of Conduct. This provides an opportunity to share information and views to help shape the authority.
- 3 Clear and focussed terms of reference as regards the requirements of the Standards Committee, the key to the Committee's work is of course the terms of reference provided by the authority, if good working relationships exist as set out in 2 above then there an opportunity for the Committees non statutory role to work along side other parts of the authority in a cross cutting way so as to ensure standards are embedded in the general workings of the council as a whole.
- 4 In parished areas the relationship with parish and town council's is critical to promoting openness and accountability at a very local level. The Standards Committees in those areas have a major role in helping them improve general standards of behaviour which if successful will generally lead to improvements in accountability and openness. Considerable resources are needed in some areas to achieve this. South Gloucestershire Standards Committee member s have previously attended all parish and town councils and are to revisit them in the coming months.

They also host 2 training sessions each year for clerks and have hosted a number of training events for parish and town councillors. This is a very significant task, but it is seen as critical to achieving both openness and accountability.

Yours sincerely

Gill Sinclair
Deputy to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Legal & Democratic Services