

# AIMSce

Association of Independent Members of Standards Committees in England.  
Dane Lodge, Main Road, Newbridge, Isle of Wight. PO41 0TR  
Tel: 01983 531 427; Fax: 01983 531 885;  
E-mail: [bruce.claxton@aimsce.org.uk](mailto:bruce.claxton@aimsce.org.uk)  
Website: [www.aimsce.org.uk](http://www.aimsce.org.uk).

**Newsletter – August 2009.**

## **CURRENT ISSUES.**

### **1. The Standards Committee (Further Provisions) (England) Regulations 2009.**

These Regulations Came into Force on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

### **2. Joint Standards Committees Guidance.**

The Standards Board for England's Guidance for Joint Standards Committees has been published.

### **3. AIMSce's first significant Training Event.**

Development of this event has reached a stage where we have in place two main speakers and an indication that Standards for England will also provide a speaker. Although the Training Event is not limited to members, it is limited in numbers. Therefore we are giving our members an advance **invitation with booking form – see Attachment 1**. If the first 60 completed applications come from members then we will consider holding a repeat with invitations going to all standards committees.

### **4. “SAFEGUARDING”**

Peter F. Wyles, Vice Chairman, Standards Committee, Portsmouth City Council offers the following contribution to the debates held through our bi-monthly newsletters. The Association has not yet formed a view on this topic but it will be on the agenda for the directors' meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> September. Therefore, all members of the Association with a view on this issue, please let me know before the meeting so that we may take your views into account.

“If you are involved in organising a children's club, offer lodgings to overseas students, give personal tuition or act as a sports coach you will be required to register with the new “Independent Safeguarding Authority” (ISA). Nothing to do with investments!

You will have seen the publicity about children's authors having to register in order to read their work to classes of children, never to a single child. The rules are all encompassing and the churches are all hurriedly registering the members of their congregations who take the Sunday School groups, even 16-18 olds who perform that role. **The Government says that it will be the largest register of its kind in the world with over eleven million names.**

Where does that leave our elected members? There is no law that compels them to take a Criminal Records Bureau check, although many Councils have for some time expected

Councillors with manifestos for children and vulnerable adults to take such checks. Some refuse on libertarian grounds! Surely all Councillors, by the fact of their election are liable to have such access in their constituency activity beyond any manifesto role that they hold.

The Home Office and the Standards Board offer no direct instruction on this matter and make vague suggestions. This Association needs to lobby them quite forcibly to make these checks compulsory for all Councillors as soon as possible.

In the meantime Independent Members of Standards Committees should be leading the way, where no action has already been taken, to get their Council to recognise the situation and pass a resolution that all elected / re-elected members are required to take a CRB check, within 14 days, as part of their induction, so that the matter then becomes a part of their Code of Conduct, enforceable by the local Standards Committee. The Candidates for election would have prior knowledge and would be seen as accepting the check by standing for election..

This would also demonstrate that the Authority members accepted the same “burden” that they, and the law, places on a large proportion of their employees.

It is time for action, if you have not already “acted”; and congratulations if you have.”

#### **5. First West Yorkshire Regional Standards Conference.**

Mike Wilkinson writes:-

The first West Yorkshire Regional Standards Conference was held in Bradford on 9 July. A large number of delegates from all five metropolitan district Standards Committees as well as those of the Fire, Police & Transport authorities, together with Monitoring Officers, attended. Speakers were Cllr Mehboob Khan, Leader of Kirklees & a member of the Standards Board, & Paul Hoey, Head of Policy & Guidance at Standards for England. There was a declarations of interest quiz, case studies on local assessment and a Monitoring Officer Panel session. It is likely that a similar event will be held early next year.

#### **6. Standards and Ethics award judges named.**

On 28 July Standards for England announced that;

Dr Michael Macaulay, Reader in Governance and Public Ethics at Teesside Business School, University of Teesside, Nick Raynsford MP, and Dr Bob Chilton, Chair of Standards for England will judge the Standards and Ethics category at the 2010 LGC Awards.

The standards and ethics award, supported by Standards for England, recognises the achievements of the authorities who consistently deliver principled local politics and strive to improve public trust in local democracy.

Authorities can enter online at [www.lgcawards.co.uk](http://www.lgcawards.co.uk) where they can also find more information on the LGC Awards themselves and the Criteria for the Standards and Ethics category. The closing date for entries is 13 November 2009.

## **Repeated issues.**

### **1. Annual Assembly.**

The Association has been invited to host a Fringe Event and also to have an Exhibition Space of 2m x 2m. We accepted the invitation for these; we have three years of prior experience of hosting a Fringe Event. The title of the Fringe Event is “Into Focus – The development of Independent Members”. The exhibition space includes a table and two chairs. We will be seeking offers from members to assist at the exhibition space in due course.

Meanwhile since the Assembly has proven most popular in recent years and has in fact been sold out several weeks before the start of the event, you are encouraged to book your place early. If this is done by your authority, then experience leads to the advice, to keep the pressure on so that your authority books early to ensure your place. If you fail to get a booking please let us know.

### **2. Annual General Meeting and Training Event.**

The Association will hold its Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 11 November, 2009 at Islington Town Hall at 1:30 pm.

### **3. Local Government Award.**

We are pleased to share with you all the submission made by Newcastle City Council which resulted in Newcastle City Council’s Standards Committee being a finalist in the Standards and Ethics category at the LGC Awards 2009. This has been scanned in – **See Attachment 2.**

### **4. Annual Subscriptions.**

Subscriptions renewal was due on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2009. Only 4 remain outstanding.

### **5. Recruitment.**

Recruitment is continuing; we have welcomed 27 new members so far this year. We would very much like to recruit at least one Independent Member of every eligible Standards Committee. Please help us to recruit new members. If you know of any Independent Members who are newly appointed, upgrading to the role of Chair of the Standards Committee or a sub-committee of a Standards Committee and are not yet AIMSce members then please encourage them to join us.

### **6. Directors.**

Following our recent appeal for volunteers to become directors of the Association we have had one response so far. We shall invite him to attend our next directors meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> September and take matters forward from there. If anyone else wishes to come forward,

including any of the new 27 Members, please let me know. If you feel able to give your support please come forward with your suggestions. We meet about four times a year; the rest of the work is generally done by e-mail.

## **QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS.**

Do you have one? AIMSce continues to get asked questions about all matters of concern from individual Independent Members. We welcome these. If there is something that is of concern to you, please send it in to Bruce Claxton at [bruce.claxton@aimsce.org.uk](mailto:bruce.claxton@aimsce.org.uk)

## **Your contributions to the Newsletters.**

Please help to spread good practice by providing information that we can publish to assist our members to benefit from the experiences of each other.

## **Independent Members Forums.**

The following meetings have been advised:

The **Derbyshire Forum** for independent members: Date and Location not yet notified. Contact Michael Blake at [Mjblake@btinternet.com](mailto:Mjblake@btinternet.com).

**The Yorks & The Humber** Independent Members' Forum will next meet on Friday 30 October at 2pm at Huddersfield Town Hall. Contact Mike Wilkinson at [mike.wilkinson@aimsce.org.uk](mailto:mike.wilkinson@aimsce.org.uk).

The **Hampshire, Isle of Wight, East Sussex, West Sussex and Surrey** Independent Members' Forum will next meet on Monday, 19 October 2009 at Arun District Council, Civic Centre, Maltravers Road, Littlehampton, BN17 5LF. Contact Bruce Claxton at [bruce.claxton@aimsce.org.uk](mailto:bruce.claxton@aimsce.org.uk).

Bruce Claxton, Newsletter Editor.

## ATTACHMENT 1

**AIMSce** Association of Independent Members of Standards Committees in England  
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### **Training Event 2009 - Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2009.**

The Association is holding its first significant training event at Islington Town Hall on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2009. This may be of particular interest to Independent members who have not been to the Standards Board for England's Annual Assembly in October.

The theme for the day is

### **“Best Practice training for Independent Members before Appointment as Chair of a Standards Committee”.**

Speakers for the day are:-

**Alison Kelly**, Strategic Advisor, Governance and Accountability Audit Commission, who will speak on matters concerning High Standards of Conduct, the Ethical Framework and how they relate to Good Governance and the Audit Commission.

**Dr Michael Macaulay**, Reader in Governance and Public Ethics, Teesside Business School, University of Teesside, who will refer to research work relating to Public Ethics particularly in respect of local government and the impact of Independent Members of Standards Committees and their role as chairmen.

**Anne Rehill or another**, Standards for England, who will refer to the new training curriculum for Members of Standards Committees, the Role of Independent Members and how the Independent Chair can lead the Ethical agenda.

Registration will begin at 9:30; the first session will start at 10:00 am.  
The afternoon session will start at 2:00 pm and will close at 4:00 pm.

Tea, coffee, cold water and biscuits will be available at registration time and at breaks. Please note that lunch will not be provided – there are cafes and restaurants in Upper Street. The fee for the day is £85:00, a discounted rate for members of AIMSce is £75:00. Early booking is advised. Places will be allocated on a first come first served basis. The completed booking form must be accompanied by the fee.

AIMSce reserves the right to cancel the event if insufficient delegates have applied and paid by Friday 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2009.

R. B. Claxton, Chairman.

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#### BOOKING FORM.

Please reserve a place for:-

Name: ..... Address: .....  
.....  
E: Mail: ..... Telephone: .....  
Authority: ..... Position: .....

As a delegate on the course.

Fee due payable with Booking Form:	For Members of AIMSce	£75:00
	For non members	£85:00

Cheques to be made payable to “AIMSce” and sent to “Dane Lodge”, Main Road, Newbridge, Isle of Wight. PO41 0TR,

or

Payment by BACS to Lloyds TSB Bank plc, Newport IOW (309599) Branch, 22 St Thomas' Square, Newport, Isle of Wight PO30 1SQ; Account name – AIMSce; Account Number – 2326482; Sort Code – 30-95-99.

The fee will be refundable if the course is cancelled due to insufficient applications have been received by Friday 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2009.

Please note that places are a limited to a total of sixty.

## **Newcastle City Council - Standards Committee (Submission for LGC Awards)**

### 1. Ethical Governance Audit (EGA)

Building on an Ethical Governance Audit in 2004, we carried out a further audit in 2007/08 to explore the level of awareness of the Council's arrangements for promoting high standards of ethical governance in the Council.

All members and officers were encouraged to complete the appropriate questionnaire online (with reminders to staff included in the online staff information bulletin). Managers were asked to draw the questionnaire to the attention of officers without access to e mail.

805 officers responded. That represents approximately 11.5% of staff with access to email and 6% of all Council staff.

The questionnaire for members went to all councillors (78) and those co-opted members with voting rights (8).24 (28%) responded.

The Committee considered the level of responses to be good for a voluntary survey. The responses demonstrated that there had been an increased level of awareness between 2004 and 2008.

However, some areas needed attention and the Committee agreed actions to address the issues raised.

### 2. Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007/ local assessment

The Committee has been briefed in detail on Part 10 of the 2007 Act and has prepared for the new regime for local assessment of complaints against members.

The Committee decided on a procedure for local assessment, a standard complaint form, and a set of initial criteria to assist in the assessment of complaints.

It agreed arrangements for publicising the changes to the complaints procedure. Details of the new procedure are shown on the Council's website and 1500 new leaflets for the public have been prepared and distributed to relevant officers, Customer Service Centres, local housing offices, sports centres, local libraries and faith communities. In addition, a notice about the new system appeared in the Council's CityLife magazine, distributed to every household in Newcastle.

A presentation was made to the top 200 managers in the Council to explain the new system.

The Committee now looks forward to the challenges of operating the new procedures.

### 3. New code of conduct for non-voting co-optees

Following the adoption of the new code of conduct for members in May 2007, the Committee recommended adoption of a revised code for non-voting co-optees. The City Council approved the Committee's proposals.

#### 4. Complaints

The Committee monitors the operation of the Council's protocol for dealing with complaints against councillors.

We have a relatively small number of complaints.

We believe this reflects the fact that generally our members observe high standards of conduct.

#### 5. Declarations of gifts and hospitality

The Committee also monitors the arrangements for registering gifts and hospitality. Over the last few years, the Committee has developed a system of monthly returns (including nil returns). This works well and is a helpful way of assisting members to make declarations.

The system is supported by the political parties.

The number of returns has increased year on year.

The register of gifts and hospitality has been open to public inspection from 2002 and we receive occasional requests to inspect it from members of the public.

#### 6. Standards Board pilot workshop on new code of conduct

Members of the Committee took part in one of the Standards Board's pilot workshops on the new code of conduct which those who attended thought was a useful and interesting exercise. Feedback from the Standards Board was that the discussions had been helpful.

#### 7. Work on partnerships and codes of conduct

The Committee has worked hard over the last year or so to ensure all the main partnerships with which the Council is involved have robust codes of conduct in place given the powers and resources those partnerships now have access to. There are 30 main partnerships. These are partnerships which, based on their contribution to the Council's objectives, the level of resources provided by the Council, or the risk to the Council's reputation from its involvement, have been classified as "significant partnerships" by the Council.

#### 8. Joint training session commissioned.

Following the adoption of the new code of conduct for members in May 2007, our Council co-ordinated and delivered a regional seminar for elected members and co-optees to inform them of the new code. Representatives from across the region attended the seminar which ran for half a day.

#### 9. Participation in the regional Standards Committees Chairs meeting.

The chair and an officer from Legal Services generally take an active part in these meetings. The meetings help us share best practice and learn from one another.

## 10. E learning modules

We have introduced a number of employee development approaches designed to raise awareness and understanding of the Newcastle Charter, including introducing an e learning programme. The Newcastle Charter is the constitution for the City Council. It sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to make sure that these are efficient and transparent and accountable to local people.

During the municipal year 2007/2008, three more modules for the elearning programme were developed by officers on our behalf. These included a module on the Council's Member/Officer Relations Protocol.

The Committee supports the continued development of the e-learning programme and preparing a module on the Code of Conduct will be one of our priorities in the coming year.

### 10 Page for standards issues on website

We have developed a specific page for standards issues on the Council's website. This includes details about the ethical governance framework, details about the Committee

and its meetings, a link to the code of conduct and local protocols, "current issues", and a link to the Parish Councils' page on the website.

11. Use of IT - Committee Management Information System - new software is currently being installed and is to be used soon for electronic declarations of interest and gifts and hospitality returns.

12. Each year, our independent chair presents the Committee's annual report to full Council and it is clear from those discussions that the Committee's work is highly regarded.

13. Use of the Council's bi-monthly residents' newspaper - City Life

We put an advert about the changes to the procedure for making complaints against councillors in City Life.

In addition, an article written by the Chair was included in the September/October 2008 edition.

14) Presentation by Chief Executive to Managers' Communications Session

Our Chief Executive gave a presentation to managers about the Committee and the new system for handling complaints alleging members have breached the code of conduct.

(We have also used the internal Staff Information bulletin to draw staff attention to the code of conduct for members and the work of the Committee).

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