

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Standards Committee

9 August 2006

AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Democratic Services Officer

STANDARDS COMMITTEE WEBPAGE

Purpose

1. To inform members of the options available for a Standards Committee webpage.

Background

2. The Chairman will be preparing an article on the Standards Committee for the winter edition of *South Cambs Magazine* and the article could refer interested parties to the Committee's website for further information.

Considerations

3. The modern.gov meeting and forward plan enquiry system on the Council's website already contains details of the Standards Committee (see **Appendix A**), such as:
 - (a) Links to agendas and minutes (from the committee's first meeting in January 2002 to the present)
 - (b) Contact details for committee members and links to district members' webpages
 - (c) Attendance statistics
 - (d) Meeting statistics
 - (e) Declarations of interest made at meetings
 - (f) Purpose of the committee
 - (g) Links to the Constitution for further details about the committee's responsibilities
 - (h) Democratic services officer and contact information
4. The scamb.gov.uk website is being linked to the modern.gov website to enable searching of the latter from the Council's main page, reducing the amount of time it can take for information to be located.

Options

5. The majority of the information about the committee already is held within the modern.gov site, and all officers in the Democratic Services Section have access to amend, update or otherwise alter the pages as required. A link to this webpage could be added to the Council's main website under the Council and Democracy menu. Other features on this Committee page could include photographs and links to external websites such as the Standards Board for England.
6. The modern.gov site also offers a searchable Library feature in which are stored documents relating to the democratic process but not part of agendas or minutes, such as the Constitution, the Members' Allowance Scheme, and guides for members of the public wishing to ask questions at meetings. A separate header could be created here for "Standards Committee" and any relevant documents uploaded, such as SBE publications (The Code Review or the Standards Bulletin), or local protocols

such as procedures for local investigations and hearings. Links could be created to these documents from the main committee information webpage.

Implications

7. Financial	None. The Council already owns all the necessary software and storage space.
Legal	All information on the website must comply with the Constitution (Access to Information Procedure Rules) and various legislation (Freedom of Information, Data Protection). The website may not be used for party political or electioneering purposes.
Staffing	All Democratic Services Officers have access to amend the modern.gov committee pages as required, and three have had additional training as editors of the Council's website.
Risk Management	Neither the modern.gov nor the scams.gov.uk server is situated locally. Regular back-ups of each server are created to allow rapid restoration of information in the event of a system failure.
Equal Opportunities	The Council's website contains tips to increase the default text size of all its pages to assist residents with visual impairments. During the 2006/07 year, the Web Services Officer will be investigating accessibility issues such as having the Council's website tested for compliancy with the Disability Discrimination Act, and providing assistive technologies such as a screen reader to convert text into audio so webpages can be "read" to the viewer. Webpages and all documents linked to them can be printed and posted to residents without internet access.

Consultations

8. Web Services Officer and other Cambridgeshire authority websites (of which Huntingdonshire District Council and Peterborough City Council have Standards Committee webpages; see **Appendices B and C**).

Conclusions/Summary

9. Much of the basic information about the Standards Committee is available already via modern.gov, and through this system is updated automatically with links to new minutes and agendas, and changes in membership. This system has the ability to add relevant documents, links to external websites, photographs and on-line public consultation. There is much focus for expanding the amount of information available to the public on the work of the Standards Committee, and possibly with linking or amalgamating this page with the Parish Council Guidance page, which includes advice and forms for parish councils regarding the Code of Conduct, register of interests and dispensations.

Recommendations

10. It is recommended that the Standards Committee:
- (a) decide (or delegate to the Chairman in conjunction with the Monitoring Officer to decide) what information should be included and a mechanism for keeping this under review to ensure that all relevant information is added promptly and any outdated information is archived electronically;
 - (b) nominate a member or members to liaise with Democratic Services for creation and on-going maintenance of the webpage; and

- (c) promote the new website via the winter 2006 edition of *South Cambs Magazine* as part of the proposed article about the Committee.

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

11.	Affordable Homes	None.
	Customer Service	A website would promote the work of the Standards Committee, giving the public opportunities to understand its role, opportunities to attend meetings, and the responsibilities held by district and parish council members.
	Northstowe and other growth areas	None.
	Quality, Accessible Services	A website is available to anyone with internet access, whether at home, at work or at a public library or internet café, and can be viewed at any time of the day or night at the user's convenience. The website and any documents stored there can be printed and posted to anyone without internet access. See also Equal Opportunities Implications above.
	Village Life	The Standards Committee has a role in promoting ethical standards in all levels of local government, including parish councils.
	Sustainability	The information will be held electronically and updated automatically, reducing reliance upon paper copies, which must be reprinted and replaced after each change.
	Partnership	The website could be linked to other authorities and partner organisations such as the Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils (CALC) to help the public direct their queries to the appropriate body, if issues are raised which do not relate to the Standards Committee's responsibilities.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: None

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