

Standards Committee: Parish Liaison Working Group

The group met on Monday 19th July '10 to consider further the responses to the survey carried out in May/June. Those present were: K English, M Farrar, B Bryant, C Tomsett. The discussion focused mainly on those areas that related to the Code of Conduct, and the key issues identified as ones to bring to the attention of the Standards Committee are listed below.

- Level of response: only 27 of 90 Parish Councils responded. The group speculated on the possible reasons for this, and suggested that the following were possible:
 - workload
 - lethargy
 - antipathy towards the Standards regime
 - awareness of the uncertainty over Government plans for the process
- Training: responses indicated a low involvement in training by Chairs, and to a lesser extent Clerks. In any Council the group saw these two people as key in the proper functioning of the PC in relation to the code. However, it was also recognised that all Councillors should be encouraged to engage in appropriate training. In discussion there were indications that new councillors coming on to PC's were displaying a greater willingness to engage in training than had previously been the case.

It was noted that training available to PC's was provided through different agencies: those indicated in the returns were CPALC, SLCC, and SCDC. (For Clerks there were also other routes to recognised qualifications). The group **recommends** that SCDC takes a clear lead in training related to the Code of Conduct, and it is suggested that this should be offered on an annual basis at an early stage of the Parish Council year - that is, following elections and/or annual meetings. Either June or September were suggested. Consideration will need to be given as to how to make this accessible to the greatest number.

- Standards Newsletter: the responses regarding this were generally positive. The group felt that the Newsletter could perhaps be used as a vehicle to raise awareness of Code related issues. One suggestion was that the inclusion of brief 'cameos' of case studies could provide a basis for useful discussion at a local level. For example, asking the question "What would you do in this situation...?"
- Visits to PCs: the practice of Standards Committee members visiting PC's was seen as an effective way of awareness raising, and that this facility should be made available to PC's. Such a visit should not just be for observation, but to make a brief input on the Code, and address questions.
- Other issues: the Group noted the other issues in the survey, such as review of financial regulations, practice related to internal audit, and the desire for a general sharing of information. It was recognised that many of these fall outside the remit of the Standards Committee, and it is suggested that there may be value in sharing some information from the survey returns with CPALC.

cft 20th July 2010