

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

30 November 2009

JOINT STANDARDS COMMITTEES

REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR (GOVERNANCE)

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RECENT REFERENCES:

ST76 – Standards Board Bulletins – 28 September 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report outlines new regulations and guidance which enable local authorities to appoint joint standards committees for all or part of their functions. The detailed Standards Board Guidance is attached as Appendix 1.

A request has been made by the Standards Committee at Test Valley Borough Council that this Council should consider whether it wishes to enter into a joint arrangement, possibly including another authority as well.

Test Valley have asked whether joint arrangements could be established for:

- (a) assessment and review of complaints alone
- (b) the whole complaints process, including determinations
- (c) the whole Standards Committee function.

If any function is subject to a joint arrangement, then it is no longer possible for the local Standards Committee to handle any of those functions. This is an important distinction because one option in the consultation stage on the proposed regulations was that a committee could pass certain cases to another authority and still act on

other cases itself. That option would have helped if there were peaks in workload or a sensitive case which would be better handled outside the area. There would have been some advantages in that option – but it was not included in the final regulations.

Locally the volume of work has been small and so peaks in work have not been experienced. Sensitive cases can be referred upwards to the Board. There is benefit in retaining local expertise and ownership of Standards issues, so that there is clear understanding of the importance of probity and conduct issues within the Authority. For these reasons it is proposed that no action be taken on the suggestion at this stage.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Test Valley Borough Council be thanked for its interest but no action be taken on joint standards committees at this stage, for the reasons set out above.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN
(RELEVANCE TO):

An Efficient and Effective Council.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

The costs of joint committees would need to be shared between authorities on an agreed basis eg workload from individual authorities. However, the cost of meetings only relates to room hire/co-optees annual allowance and travel for the Members. Travel could be increased by the need to meet at sites convenient to a wider area eg rotating meeting locations. Any savings, if any, would be minimal. The officer support within the individual authorities to the wider Standards agenda would still have to be provided.

It is still possible for officer support to be provided on occasion from another authority, should this be necessary, without using joint committee procedures.

RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

None

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

E-mail from Test Valley BC

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Standards Board Guidance – Joint Standards Committees (copies for Committee Members only) and is also available at web link

http://www.standardsforengland.gov.uk/Guidance/TheLocalStandardsFramework/Standardscommittees/Joint%20Standards%20Committees%20FINAL_for%20web1.pdf