

NORTHUMBRIA POLICE AUTHORITY**STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 14 OCTOBER**

UPDATE FROM STANDARD BOARD: DEALING WITH ALLEGED BREACHES OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Report of the Deputy Clerk and Solicitor

Purpose of the Report

1. To update Members on the ways in which the Standards Board for England propose to deal with allegations of breaches of the code of conduct.

Letter from the Standards Board

2. The Board's position is set out in its letter of 17 September 2002, a copy of which is attached as the Appendix to this report.

Comments

3. Much of what Members identified at this Committee's meeting on 29 May 2002 has come to pass. The Standards Board has had to set and apply "minimum criteria for eligibility" and is faced with in excess of 1,000 allegations which it needs to address, by an appropriate level of investigation and subject to rights of appeal for those who do not feel that their allegations have been given sufficient weight.
4. There can be no settled system regarded as acceptable by users until the Government's Section 66 regulations have been introduced and become understood. Those regulations will enable appropriate cases to be dealt with at local level.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended that the Committee:-
 - (i) note this report.
 - (ii) receive a further report following the introduction of the Government Section 66 regulations and the Board's issuing of guidance.



the
Standards Board
for England

1st Floor
Cottons Centre
Cottons Lane
London SE1 2QG

Enquiries: 084 5078 8181
Fax: 020 7378 5001

enquiries@standardsboard.co.uk
www.standardsboard.co.uk

Tyne & Wear Police Authority (Northumbria)
Civic Centre
Regent Street
Gateshead
NE8 1HH

17 September 2002

Dear Sir or Madam

The Standards Board for England has now received around 1000 allegations that elected, co-opted and independent members have broken codes of conduct, since they applied to all authorities in May 2002. In response to the increased flow of allegations, we have decided to introduce a number of measures, including:

- the most serious allegations being prioritised;
- allegations, which are clearly trivial, no longer being considered in depth;
- extra investigators recruited to address the flow of allegations earlier than first anticipated.

For the past six months, we have considered all allegations that have met our minimum criteria for eligibility. This has enabled us to learn a great deal about the nature of the issues that come before us. We do not, however, consider that it would be an appropriate use of resources to continue to conduct an in-depth investigation of those cases that The Standards Board believes to be of a trivial nature. There will, of course, be a mechanism whereby those making allegations that are not investigated can appeal.

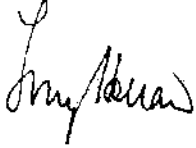
In some cases, where allegations will not be investigated immediately, we will be writing to those concerned explaining that there may be a delay. In these circumstances, we will be encouraging those accused of breaking the Code to contact us with any material or matters for consideration that they feel may be of assistance. This should help expedite the investigation, whilst maintaining our high standards.

The flow of cases being considered by the Board's investigators will also be improved by the introduction of the Government Section 66 regulations. These will enable us to refer appropriate cases for investigation and/or determination at a local level. Ministers have promised that the regulations will be in place next month. The Board will be issuing guidance to assist Standards Committees in their role with regard to the regulations.

The numbers of allegations we are currently receiving is very much as anticipated in our long-term projections. Our only surprise is that they have reached this level so quickly. It is a sign of our success in creating awareness of ourselves and proof of the need for an organisation like this. Both members and the public appreciate clearly defined boundaries of what constitutes acceptable behaviour and need a resource they can call upon if they think the boundaries have been crossed.

I hope you find the information in this letter helpful and will circulate it to both your members and anyone else you feel will benefit from it. If you have any questions relating to it, or any other issue concerning The Standards Board, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tony Holland". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T'.

Tony Holland
Chair