

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: The Monitoring Officer

REPORT NUMBER G129

TO: STANDARDS COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING: 9 November 2007

THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND JOINT WORKING CONSULTATION EVENT

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To appraise Members of the Committee of the matters discussed at the Consultation Event organised by the Standards Board on 13 September 2007 and to give further consideration to its preferences for possible Joint Committee arrangements.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That the discussions from the Joint Working Consultation Event held on 13 September 2007 be noted and in light of the points arising that the Monitoring Officer be provided with any further preferences in the conduct of the potential Joint Standards Committee pilot arrangements.

The Committee is able to resolve this matter.

3. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 None directly arising from this report.

4. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 4.1 Not applicable to this report.

5. **KEY INFORMATION**

- 5.1 The Monitoring Officer attended the Consultation Event arranged by the Standards Board for England on 13 September 2007 at the offices of Wycombe District Council. Those Monitoring Officers whose Councils have expressed an interest in participating in a pilot for joint working, were invited to the event. At the start of the day, attendees were allocated a workshop group to discuss one of four themes so that feedback could be collated by the Standards Board. Details of the workgroups and the issues discussed are set out in the Standards Board Discussion Digest at Appendix 1. The Monitoring Officer participated in the "Getting In and Getting Out" workshop which focused on securing political buy in to progressing joint arrangements and increasing the profile of standards within an authority. Having received feedback from the event, the Standards Board will have discussions with Government concerning the requirements for regulations under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill to enable joint arrangements to take effect. There will be consultation with Councils on the proposed regulations.

- 5.2 At the event, the Standards Board reported that seven groups of authorities have been consulted on joint working and five (including Suffolk) have submitted detailed feedback. There are other groups that have expressed an interest in joint arrangements and are watching how the pilot progresses. There have been very mixed preferences for the operation of joint Standards Committees which have emphasised the need to the Standards Board that a flexible legal framework and different workable structures are required.
- 5.3 From the five groups that provided feedback, three were county based (Gloucestershire, Buckinghamshire and Suffolk) and then the Standards Committees of the GLA/Metropolitan Police Authority/London Fire and Emergency Planning Committee. The final group consists of the Police Authorities of North, South and West Yorkshire and of Humberside.
- 5.4 Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire and Greater London want the Joint Committee to deal with the local filter and nothing else contrasted with Suffolk which proposed that a Joint Committee have the facility to deal with the filter and hearings as well. In those four places, feedback was received that Councils would want to keep their own Standards Committees and so far, it is only the Police Authorities that wish to establish a Joint Committee in place of their own separate Standards Committees.
- 5.5 All groups would like to establish sub-committees with four out of five wishing to use the full Joint Committee as a pool of Members able to serve on ad-hoc sub-committees. Some counties have suggested combining the membership of existing local committees although there are doubts that committees with 60 or so Members could be unwieldy or uneven. Such a committee would however need to meet formally once a year and there would be training benefits. There has also been a suggestion that Independent and Parish Members are pooled. Indeed, Greater London and Yorkshire Police would wish the Joint Committee to appoint its own Independent Members. This contrasts with Suffolk where feedback had been that individual authorities would wish to appoint their own Independent Members to serve on the Committee.
- 5.6 All groups would like the appointment of a Chair to rotate between participating authorities on an annual basis. Greater London would like to appoint a Lead Monitoring Officer and others want to share responsibility.
- 5.7 To enable joint arrangements to work regulations will be required to address a number of issues to overcome current restrictions. Parish Members would need to be allowed to deal with any parish matter in the whole area covered by the Committee and Monitoring Officers would need to be authorised to carry out cross boundary work. Flexibility would be needed to allow for “virtual” meetings either by telephone or email if a decision is to be made by a Committee or Sub-Committee comprising Members throughout the county.

6. **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – The Standards Board for England Discussion Digest.

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO:**

None.

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