

TITLE OF REPORT: **Quarterly Standards Update**

REPORT OF: **Mike Barker, Strategic Director, Corporate
Services and Governance**

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide a quarterly update to the Audit and Standards Committee highlighting national and local standards issues.
 2. To ensure Members are aware of national reviews and consultations which may be relevant to their role.
 3. To identify whether further training is required for Members.
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Committee on Standards in Public Life

Blog by Jane Ramsey (Committee Member) discusses progress on the important recommendations made by the Committee last December in its report on Intimidation in Public Life: (4 October):

1. The Committee published a major report in December 2017 making a number of recommendations in respect of the intimidation of public officials. In particular the Committee called on:
 - Government to bring forward legislation to shift the liability of illegal content online towards social media companies
 - Social media companies to ensure they are able to make decisions quickly and consistently on the takedown of intimidatory content online;
 - Government to consult on the introduction of a new offence in electoral law of intimidating Parliamentary candidates and party campaigners;
 - The political parties to work together to develop a joint code of conduct on intimidatory behaviour during election campaigns by December 2018. The code should be jointly enforced by the political parties; and
 - The National Police Chiefs Council to ensure that local police forces have sufficient training to enable them to effectively investigate offences committed through social media.
2. It is noted that whilst progress has been made, the Committee will continue to closely monitor what is being done to tackle intimidation and to do what it can to foster a political culture which supports healthy public discourse.

Minutes of Committee meeting on 20 September 2018 (published 9 November 2018)

3. The Committee noted the progress on the review of local government ethical standards: the breadth of evidence received to-date; the proposed structure of the report; and commented on draft conclusions and recommendations. It was suggested that a sub-committee of members might be formed to aid drafting of the report. The publication date and format of the launch event was discussed.
4. The agenda and minutes of the meeting can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/committee-on-standards-in-public-life-259th-meeting-thursday-20-september-2018-agenda-and-minutes>

Minutes of Committee meeting on 18 October 2018 (published 19 December 2018)

5. The Committee discussed the first full draft of the report regarding local government ethical standards. The Committee was grateful for the excellent first draft and the work that had gone into the report to-date. The publication date would be confirmed outside the meeting.
6. The Committee noted progress following up the December 2017 report on intimidation in public life. It was noted that the Conservative Party had not yet responded to the invitation to the meeting to political parties to discuss a joint code of conduct. This would be pursued.
7. The agenda and minutes of the meeting can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/committee-on-standards-in-public-life-260th-meeting-thursday-18-october-2018-agenda-and-minutes>

Minutes of Committee meeting on 15 November 2018 (published 19 December 2018)

8. The Committee discussed the final draft of the review report on local government ethical standards. The Committee was grateful for the report which all agreed was a substantive piece of work which had captured the nuances and complexities of the subject.
* The report will be published on 30 January 2019.
9. The Committee noted a meeting with Facebook in which Facebook had updated the Committee on action they had taken following publication of Intimidation in Public Life. It was also noted that plans for the meeting with political parties to follow up recommendations directed against political parties had been finalised.
10. The agenda and minutes of the meeting can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/committee-on-standards-in-public-life-261st-meeting-thursday-15-november-2018-agenda-and-minutes>

Blog by Dr Jane Martin (Committee Member) discusses the Local Government review – clarifying conflicts of interests: (16 October 2018):

11. In this blog post, Dr Jane Martin discusses the ongoing evidence gathered for the Committee's review of local government standards and the concerns being raised around the legal framework governing councillors' declaration of conflicts of interest.
12. The blog can be found at:
<https://cspl.blog.gov.uk/2018/10/16/local-government-review-clarifying-conflicts-of-interest/>

Intimidation in Public Life: political parties meeting transcript

13. As a follow up to the report on Intimidation in Public Life, the Committee held a meeting with the political parties on 20 November 2018 to discuss their recommendation that the parties must work together to develop a joint code of conduct on intimidatory behaviour during election campaigns.
14. The transcript of the meeting can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-political-parties-meeting-transcript>

Electoral integrity pilots May 2019

15. Eleven local authorities across England will be taking part in Voter ID pilots for the 2019 local elections. The pilots will provide further insight into how best to ensure the security of the voting process and reduce the risk of voter fraud.
16. The Electoral Commission is responsible for carrying out an independent evaluation of the pilot schemes, with findings due in the summer of 2019 following the May elections.
17. A press release from the Cabinet Office can be viewed at:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/735413/Electoral_Integrity_Pilots_Prospectus_2018.pdf

Electoral Commission: Digital Campaigning

18. Over the past 12 months the Electoral Commission has undertaken work looking at online communications and in particular how digital campaigning was used in the EU referendum and the 2017 General Election.
19. The report sets out a series of recommendations for immediate action to improve election rules and strengthen financial regulations, particularly around who is spending what, where and how as well as there being bigger sanctions for those who break the rules.
20. The key recommendations will increase transparency of digital campaigns and help prevent foreign funding of elections and referendum campaigns. They are also intended to give the Electoral Commission the power to impose higher fines for those who break the rules which should act as a deterrent.
21. The key recommendations are as follows:
 - Each of the UK's governments and legislatures should change the law so that digital material must have an imprint saying who is behind the campaign and who created it.
 - Each of the UK's governments and legislatures should amend the rules for reporting spending. They should make campaigners sub-divide their spending returns into different types of spending. These categories should give more information about the money spent on digital campaigns.
 - Campaigners should be required to provide more detailed and meaningful invoices from their digital suppliers to improve transparency.
 - Social media companies should work with us to improve their policies on campaign material and advertising for elections and referendums in the UK.
 - UK election and referendum adverts on social media platforms should be labelled to make the source clear. Their online databases of political adverts should follow the UK's rules for elections and referendums.
 - Each of the UK's governments and legislatures should clarify that spending on election or referendum campaigns by foreign organisations or individuals is not allowed. They would need to consider how it could be enforced and the impact on free speech.
 - We will make proposals to campaigners and each of the UK's governments about how to improve the rules and deadlines for reporting spending. We want information to be available to voters and us more quickly after a campaign, or during.
 - Each of the UK's governments and legislatures should increase the maximum fine we can sanction campaigners for breaking the rules, and strengthen our powers to obtain information outside of an investigation.

22. The report can be found at:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/political-parties-campaigning-and-donations/digital-campaigning>

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

New rules banning those found guilty of serious crimes from councils

23. In response to the 2017 consultation “Disqualification criteria for councillors and mayors”, the Government is to introduce new disqualification rules to prevent people found guilty of serious crimes from serving as councillors and mayors
24. The new rules will mean any person who is subject to an Anti-Social Behaviour Injunction, a Criminal Behaviour Order, a Sexual Risk Order or who is on the Sex Offenders’ Register, will no longer be able to stand for elected office in their community.
25. This will bring the rules in line with modern sentencing practice.
26. The Governments response to the consultation can be viewed at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/disqualification-criteria-for-councillors-and-mayors>
27. The press release containing a summary of the details can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-toughens-rules-banning-sex-offenders-from-councils>

Future Updates

A Standards Update will be provided on a quarterly basis to the Standards and Audit Committee.

It is noted that the content of the Update will vary depending on the local and national picture that that time.

Contact: Angela Simmons-Mather

Ext: 2662