

INDEPENDENT PERSONS' WORKSHOP

Bedford Borough Council. Monday 15 October 2012

The role of the independent person - promoting and maintaining high standards

Under the local standards framework introduced by the Localism Act, councils remain under a duty 'to promote and maintain high standards' so the Government clearly recognises the importance of continuing to encourage high standards.

Under the previous framework much work was done by independent standards committee chairs to encourage political and managerial leadership to focus on building a culture of high standards.

Will councils still wish to promote high standards on the basis that 'prevention is better than cure' or will the pared-down framework mean focus is now solely on reacting to cases?

Questions for discussion

- Should the independent person have any role in wider advice to Council on promoting high standards/reviewing procedures? Is that role still required/relevant/desirable?
- What is your role in relation to supporting parish councils?
- How, if at all, do you promote yourselves as independent to the public who have complaints?
- How, if at all, are you to act as advocates for the council to the public to highlight high standards?
- Should you be attending council meetings to observe the council culture and understand the way it works or are you to remain apart from day-to-day working?
- Is your role restricted to member conduct or do you have a role in wider governance issues?
- Is the role there primarily to support the Monitoring Officer or should you be seen as separate from officers and members?

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Working as a pool

In Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes, you are working as a 'pool' of ten independent persons. There are some particular issues you may therefore want to think through to ensure you work most effectively and efficiently.

Questions for discussion

- Do you have/should you have common procedures so that your role is clear whichever authority you are supporting?
- Where there are different Codes, are you familiar with them all? Do you need to be?
- Should you be familiar with the workings, leadership and political cultures of all the authorities or is it better to be seen as independent from the authorities or only familiar with one in particular?
- Do you have an agreed media strategy between the authorities?
- Are you public-facing? If so, how does the public in any one district know who they should contact?

Should particular members of the pool be designated particular roles (e.g. parish liaison rep) or should you all have general responsibilities rather than specialisms?