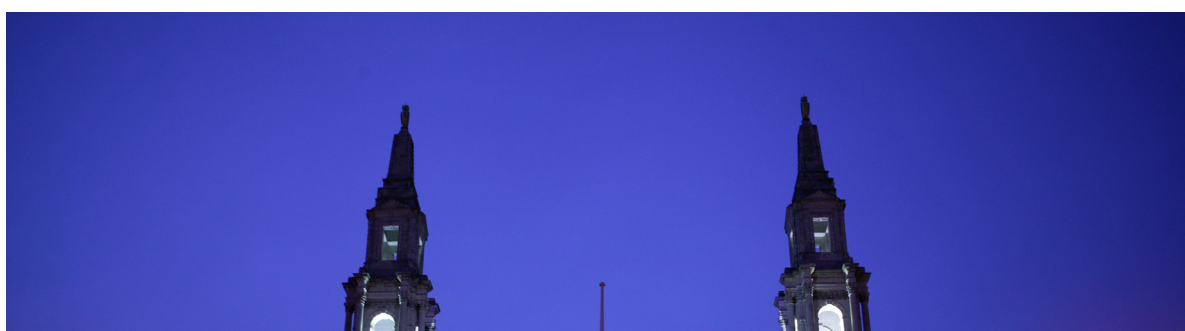


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# Standards Committee

## Annual Report 2005 – 2006



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## Introduction

The Local Government Act 2000 requires councils to set up a standards committee. Standards committees have a proactive role in creating an ethical framework which governs the relationship between high standards of conduct and transparency and openness in decision making.

The Annual Report presents a summary of the Leeds City Council Standards Committee's work during 2005/2006 and supports the Corporate Governance arrangements of the Council by promoting good conduct and cascading information.

## Foreword from the Chair

I have pleasure in introducing this first Annual Report of the Leeds City Council Standards Committee. Its appearance reflects our concern to enhance awareness – by Councillors, Council staff and the people of Leeds – of the Committee's role and activities.

The Committee has an important job in seeking to ensure high standards of behaviour among Councillors and Co-opted members. I hope that the contents of this Annual Report will give you a good feel for our current work and also for further developments and changes that are likely over the next year. In particular, the section on issues for 2006/2007 flags up likely changes in the national framework which would lead to a more substantial role for the Standards Committee.

*M. Wilkinson*

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## Members of the Committee

The Standards Committee is composed of two independent members, three City Councillors, and one Parish Councillor. There are also two reserve members; an independent reserve member and a parish reserve member. In March 2006 the membership of the Committee changed when Councillor Brian Jennings temporarily replaced Councillor Kirkland.

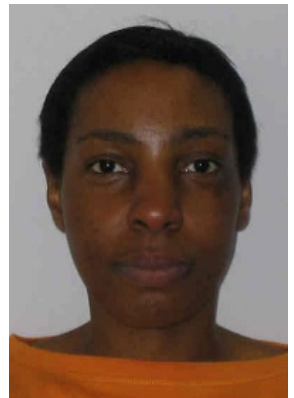
### Mike Wilkinson

has been an independent member and Chair of the Committee since 2002. Until 2001 he was a University Secretary and Clerk to the Board at Leeds Metropolitan University. He is a magistrate on the Leeds Bench and also acts as an Independent Assessor to the Student Loans Company. He is a Director of UNIPOL Student Homes.



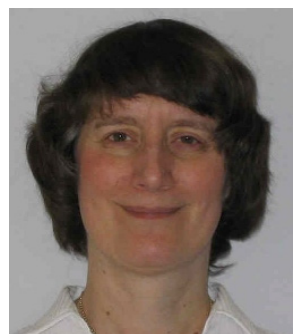
### Cheryl Grant

joined the Standards Committee in 2003 as a reserve independent member, and was appointed as a full independent member in 2004. Cheryl currently works at the Leeds Metropolitan University as Associate Senior Lecturer in the School of Film, Television and Performing Arts. She also works as a freelance producer.



### Rosemary Greaves

joined the Standards Committee in 2004 as a reserve independent member. Rosemary currently works for BT as a Business Manager specialising in business development and strategy which includes developing significant new business propositions or identifying potential acquisition requirements.



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### **Councillor Les Carter**

is a member of the Conservative Group and has been a Leeds City Councillor since 1974. He represents the Adel and Wharfedale ward on Leeds City Council and is also an Executive Board Member with responsibility for Neighbourhoods and Housing. Councillor Carter's areas of responsibility include housing policy and strategy, community safety, regeneration, homelessness and environmental health.



### **Councillor Elizabeth Nash**

is a member of the Labour Group and has been a Leeds City Councillor since 1973. She represents the City and Hunslet ward on Leeds City Council, has been a member of the Committee since 2003, and is also a member of the City Centre Plans Panel.



### **Councillor Graham Kirkland**

is a member of the Liberal Democrat Group and represents the Otley and Yeadon ward on Leeds City Council. He has been a Councillor for a total of 39 years, and was Lord Mayor from 1998-1999. Councillor Kirkland is also a member of the Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Board. Councillor Kirkland was replaced by Councillor Brian Jennings from March 2006 until the end of the municipal year due to a short period of ill health.



### **Councillor Brian Jennings**

is also a Member of the Liberal Democrat Group and joined the Committee on a temporary basis in March 2006. Councillor Jennings represents the Weetwood ward on the Council and is the Executive Board member with responsibility for Children's Services.



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### **Councillor Mrs Pat Walker**

is a member of Pool-in-Wharfedale Parish Council which she was elected to for the first time 6 years ago. She is lead member on conservation matters. Previously a Harrogate District Councillor, she has been involved in politics at local, national and European levels. A business manager in Leeds and Harrogate for 25 years, she is now an active member of the Ruskin Society and is presently a Foundation Governor of Prince Henry's Grammar School, Otley.



### **Councillor John C Priestley**

joined the Committee in 2005 as a reserve parish member. He is a retired (litigation) solicitor and was a senior partner of Booth & Co. Leeds. He retired in 2002 and is now an elected Parish Councillor with East Keswick Parish Council and a member of the Wetherby and District Crime Prevention Committee. He is also a Trustee of the W.W. Spooner Charitable Trust.



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## Introduction to the Standards Committee

The general functions of the Standards Committee are:

- ▶ Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Members and co-opted members; and
- ▶ Assisting Members and co-opted members to observe the Code of Conduct.

The terms of reference for the Committee are:

- ▶ Promoting, monitoring and reviewing the rules controlling the behaviour of Councillors and Officers (Code of Conduct);
- ▶ To consider any complaints made about the behaviour of Councillors and decide whether their behaviour has broken the rules described above. If the Councillor is found to have broken the rules, the Committee decide what punishment to impose;
- ▶ To make suggestions to and work with other agencies about standards issues and the different codes of conduct. This involves taking part in research projects and consultation exercises, as well as letting the Standards Board for England know about things the Committee are doing well;
- ▶ To provide advice and guidance to Members and officers and to make arrangements for training them on standards issues;
- ▶ To advise the Council about changes which need to be made to the code of conduct for Officers and to promote, monitor and review this code.

More details about the rules of procedure governing the Committee can be found on the Leeds City Council website and within the constitution.

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## Parish Councils

The Standards Committee has a special responsibility to the Parish and Town Councils in Leeds. The Standards Committee is responsible for ensuring high standards of conduct are met within the parishes and that every Member is aware of their responsibilities under the code of conduct.

The Parish and Town Councils in the Authority's area are:

Aberford & District	Drighlington	Otley
Allerton Bywater	East Keswick	Pool-in-Wharfedale
Arthington	Gildersome	Pudsey
Austhorpe	Great and Little Preston	Scarcroft
Bardsey Cum Rigton	Harewood	Shadwell
Barwick in Elmet & Scholes	Horsforth	Swillington
Boston Spa	Kippax	Thorner
Bramham cum Oglethorpe	Ledsham	Thorp Arch
Bramhope and Carlton	Ledston	Walton
Clifford	Micklefield	Wetherby
Collingham with Linton	Morley	Wothersome

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## The Monitoring Officer

In Leeds City Council, the role of the Monitoring Officer rests with the Director of Legal and Democratic Services. The Monitoring officer has a key role in promoting and maintaining standards of conduct.

As well as acting as legal advisor to the Standards Committee, the Monitoring Officer carries out the following functions:

- ▶ reporting on contraventions or likely contraventions of any enactment or rule of law;
- ▶ reporting on any maladministration or injustice where the Ombudsman has carried out an investigation;
- ▶ establishing and maintaining registers of Members' interests and gifts and hospitality;
- ▶ maintaining, reviewing and monitoring the Constitution;
- ▶ supporting the Standards Committee;
- ▶ receiving reports from Ethical Standards Officers and decisions of case tribunals;
- ▶ conducting investigations into misconduct;
- ▶ performing ethical framework functions in relation to Parish Councils;
- ▶ acting as the proper officer for access to information;
- ▶ advising whether executive decisions are within the budget and policy framework; and
- ▶ advising on vires issues, maladministration, financial impropriety, probity, and budget and policy issues to all Members.

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## The Work of the Committee 2005 – 2006

### Promoting, monitoring and reviewing the Codes of Conduct

The Standards Committee exists to promote and maintain high standards of conduct within the Council, and has considered several important standards issues over the past year, including the following:

- ▶ **Review of the Register of Members' Interests** – the Committee has considered how the systems in place for recording and reviewing Members' interests could be improved. The Committee also took the decision that the register should be published on the internet in order to improve transparency and accessibility.
- ▶ **Hyperlink to the Standards Board for England** – the Committee has simplified the way that members of the public can report suspected breaches of the code of conduct. There is now a link to the Standards Board website in the form of a logo as well as access to the Council's internal complaints procedure.
- ▶ **Consideration of Local Complaints** – the Committee has considered one complaint in the last year, which was referred to the Council for local investigation by the Standards Board for England. The Committee decided that there was no breach of the code of conduct. The Committee also regularly review complaints and cases from other authorities in order to get a national picture of developments and identify any problem areas which can be addressed.
- ▶ **Constitutional Amendments** – In preparation for the possibility of holding a local hearing, the Committee has made amendments to its media protocol and procedure rules. The Committee also considered whether to establish a hearings sub-committee and one has now been established to hear cases involving Parish or Town Councillors. This sub-committee has its own terms of reference. All these documents can be found within the constitution.

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- ▶ **Review of the Member/Officer Protocol** – The Member/Officer Protocol guides Members and officers in their relations with one another in such a way as to ensure the smooth running of the Council and to foster good working relationships. The protocol ensures that Members receive objective and impartial advice and that officers are protected from accusations of bias and any undue influence from Members. The Standards Committee decided to make a series of amendments to the protocol in line with a new model protocol which was published earlier in the year. The amended protocol now addresses specific issues such as the roles of Members and officers and the use of Council resources.
  - ▶ **Officer Code of Conduct** - In February 2005 the Council enhanced the Terms of Reference of the Standards Committee. As a result the Committee has advised on the adoption, by the Council, of the officer Code of Conduct and monitored its application. In March 2006 the Committee considered the maintenance of the register of officer interests and the disclosure of offers or receipts of gifts and hospitality. The Committee also considered a report by the Chief Officer of Human Resources detailing the steps the Council has taken to embed existing arrangements for officers to make declarations of interests and declarations of offers of gifts and hospitality.
  - ▶ **Raising the Profile of the Committee** – The Chair of the Standards Committee meets regularly with the Leader of Leeds City Council. This demonstrates the continuing importance placed on standards issues and the work of the Standards Committee.

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## Providing Guidance and Training

The Standards Committee has a special responsibility for ensuring that Members are trained in matters relating to the code of conduct and arranging for appropriate training to be provided. During the previous year, the Standards Committee has both reviewed and recommended training for others and taken part in training themselves.

- ▶ **Training for City Councillors** – the Standards Committee has a special responsibility for training Councillors on the code of conduct. The Member Development Strategy ensures that all Members are trained in this area through the induction programme. The Member Development Strategy was reviewed at the start of 2006 and now incorporates a rolling induction programme to ensure that Members who are elected at other times during the municipal year are also trained in the code. An understanding of the code of conduct has now been incorporated into the Personal Development Programme as a core skill for all Councillors.
- ▶ **Parish Council Training** – as well as having a responsibility for training City Councillors, the Standards Committee must also make sure that training is available for Parish Councillors. The Committee has done this by conducting a survey of what training is available and the take up of this training amongst the parishes in Leeds. The Committee has also consulted the parishes on what their current training needs are and has adapted the training provision accordingly.
- ▶ **Training the Committee** – the Committee has taken steps in the past year to improve its own skills and expertise. Several members of the Committee attended the Fourth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees this year. The Committee has taken part in a training day on how to conduct a local hearing with external specialists and has developed a training plan for its Members to ensure that all the necessary areas are covered.

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## Corporate Governance Issues

The Standards Committee shares responsibility for Corporate Governance issues with the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee. The Chair of the Standards Committee is a co-opted member of that Committee. The Committee has considered the following corporate governance issues during the year:

- ▶ **Whistleblowing Policy** – the Committee has considered the whistleblowing policy of Leeds City Council, including what protection is available for whistleblowers and how the policy is advertised.
- ▶ **Comprehensive Performance Assessment** – The Committee has considered how the Council has performed against the criteria in relation to ethical standards, and any improvements which could be made to the ethical framework.
- ▶ **Corporate Governance Statement** – The work of the Committee has contributed to the Corporate Governance Statement for 2006. An essential element of good governance is the good behaviour and conduct of Councillors and officers which the Committee promotes and maintains. It is of note that during the year 2004 – 2005 only one out of 99 Councillors was found to have breached the code of conduct. By improving training for Members the Committee has also contributed to the aim of developing skills and capacity.

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## Working with Other Agencies

During the year, the Standards Committee has taken part in policy development on a national scale through various consultation exercises. The Independent Members of the Standards Committee are involved in the Standards Committee Independent Members' Regional Forum of Yorkshire and Humberside.

- ▶ **Consultation** – the Committee took part in the national consultation exercise carried out by the Standards Board for England earlier this year about the Code of Conduct for Members. This consultation resulted in a series of recommendations being made to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to reform the code. These reforms will make the code simpler and more enabling, and will support the Councillors' role as an advocate of their local community. Further details of the consultation process, results and recommendations can be found at the Standards Board website: [www.standardsboard.co.uk](http://www.standardsboard.co.uk)
- ▶ **Independent Members' Regional Forum** – Leeds City Council has a special role on the Forum, as the Chair of the Forum is Mike Wilkinson, who is also the Chair of the Standards Committee. This Forum seeks to enable members to share their experiences, views and concerns about their role as independent members and to provide a means of communication and liaison between members. The Forum acts as a focal point for communication between independent members of Yorkshire and Humber and the Standards Board for England, and assists in fostering best practice amongst its membership and supports members in the delivery of their roles as independent members. Through their involvement in the Forum, the Independent Members of the Standards Committee has been able to provide feedback and suggestions to the Standards Board for England as well as representatives from other authorities.

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## Issues for 2006 – 2007

The Standards Committee will have many important issues to address in the coming the year, including the following:

- ▶ **New codes of conduct** – The Committee may have to consider the implementation of revised codes of conduct for Members and Officers. The government is expected to introduce the revised code in line with the discussion paper by the ODPM entitled 'Standards of Conduct in English Local Government: The Future' which can be found on the ODPM website [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk).
- ▶ **Implementation of Parish Council Training** – The comprehensive training requirements and plan for Parish Councillors that the Committee considered last year will be fully implemented this year. Parish Councillors will now be able to take more part in the training offered by Democratic Services, and the specialised code of conduct training provided to clerks and councillors will become more focused.
- ▶ **Changes in Committee membership** – the Committee may have changes to its membership during the year. Both one of the independent members and the reserve independent member come to the end of their term of office during 2007. To keep up to date with the membership of the Committee and any upcoming vacancies for independent members, see the Leeds City Council website [www.leeds.gov.uk](http://www.leeds.gov.uk)
- ▶ **Changes in the role of the Standards Board** – the indications are that as a result of the recent review of the Standards Board's performance, the Standards Board may alter its role to become more of a strategic regulator. This may lead to more complaints against Members being referred to the Standards Committee for local investigation and determination.

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- ▶ **Launch of the Ethical Audit** – In order to assess how well the ethical framework is understood and how high the profile of standards is within the authority, the Standards Committee will launch and champion an ethical audit this year. This will help the Council prepare for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and allow the Committee to identify where training is most needed.
  - ▶ **Raising the profile of the Committee** – At the start of this municipal year, the Chair of the Standards Committee together with the Monitoring Officer, will be meeting the Councillors to outline the role of the Standards Committee. It is vital that the Members are aware of the work of the Committee, in particular their responsibility for providing training and guidance for Members on standards issues.

## Useful Links

If you would like to find out more about standards issues and the work of the Committee, as well as keep up to date with national issues, you may find the following links useful:

- ▶ **The Standards Board for England** (for guidance on standards issues, standards committees and outcomes of recent cases)  
[www.standardsboard.co.uk](http://www.standardsboard.co.uk)
- ▶ **The Adjudication Panel for England** – [www.adjudicationpanel.co.uk](http://www.adjudicationpanel.co.uk)
- ▶ **The Audit Commission** – [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)
- ▶ **Office of the Deputy Prime Minister** – [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)
- ▶ **National Association of Local Councils** – [www.nalc.co.uk](http://www.nalc.co.uk)
- ▶ **Leeds City Council** – [www.leeds.gov.uk](http://www.leeds.gov.uk)
- ▶ **Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy** –  
[www.ipf.co.uk](http://www.ipf.co.uk)
- ▶ **The Countryside Agency** – [www.countryside.gov.uk](http://www.countryside.gov.uk)