

DEVON & CORNWALL POLICE AUTHORITY

REPORT ON METINGS OF CORNWALL AND THE ISLES OF SCILLY ETHICAL STANDARDS FORUM

1. Background

The Forum was established in November 2005 at a conference organised by North Cornwall District Council with the aim of bringing together monitoring officers and standards committee members to discuss matters of mutual interest. The Forum received the endorsement of the Standards Board for England and was addressed by its Chair, Sir Anthony Holland. The broader objectives have been refined so that experience is shared, giving greater consistency of approach across the County. Initiatives are also being taken to raise awareness of the ethical agenda and establish "best practice" recommendations for Authorities.

2. Conference 23rd May 2006

Approximately 50 people attended the conference at Tregenna Castle, St Ives with Martin Harvey representing the D & C PA. The conference saw the launch of a Standards Committee Information leaflet to explain to the public the role of Standards Committees, how complaints are dealt with and who is on the local committee. Most local authorities are committed to adopt the leaflet. The conference was addressed by the Standards Board Communications Manager on "How the Standards Board Communicates". The consensus of delegates was "not very well". Graham Rowe of Ashfords addressed the conference, giving an update on case law and a presentation on considering evidence. It was a well received presentation and the case law summary was very similar to the presentation subsequently given at our training days. A number of question and answer sessions throughout the day gave ample opportunity for delegates to raise concerns and share experiences.

3. Forum Meeting 14 July 2006

Meeting hosted by Carrick District Council. Reviewed feedback on the May Conference, which was positive, and resolved to hold similar conferences annually. It was also agreed that themed meetings to address specific issues, such as changes in legislation, would be held as required. A number of Authorities reported that they had introduced the Standards Committee Information leaflet following the conference.

The monitoring officers set up a working party to look at model investigation and hearing procedures. This would aim to build upon the Standards Board models, using the experience gained over the last 12 months. It would have the advantage of giving authorities a practical and tested model. The advantage to monitoring officers would be that time would be saved in situations where they are called to investigate/advise another authority. It is hoped that drafts will be available early autumn. The D & CPA Hearing Procedure received favourable comment and will be one of the models considered by the monitoring officers.

Lack of funding for investigations has been frequently raised at meetings. North Cornwall D.C. produced a paper which they intend to lodge with the Innovation Forum. The aim is to get funding to look at the cost implications and the benefit of shared practices together with the implications of the proposed increase in the use of local authorities in the resolution of complaints. The proposal was endorsed by the meeting, particularly as it supports many of the objectives which the local Forum has.

4. Forum Meeting 6 October 2006

At a meeting hosted by North Cornwall District Council, the Authority was represented by Joy Norris and Martin Harvey. It was reported that work on the model procedures is ongoing and should be available by early next year. The next meeting will be “workshop” style to review the procedures and will be held in the Spring. Work has also started on a training package for use in promoting the ethical agenda. It is hoped to have this available for more detailed discussion at the next meeting. There was a general discussion on matters affecting Standards Committees and a useful exchange of information.

MFH
9.10.2006.