

STANDARDS COMMITTEE – ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14

1. The Standards Committee (“the Committee”) is an advisory committee which formulates recommendations to the Governance and Audit Committee . The Committee is charged with overseeing arrangements to ensure that both Members and officers conduct the business of the Council with appropriate propriety. The Committee has responsibility for formulating and reviews Codes of Conduct and protocols relating to the behaviour of Members and officers. In addition, The Committee hears those complaints alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct for Members which have not been resolved or determined at an earlier stage under the Council’s approved procedure for the consideration of such complaints.
2. Throughout the municipal year the Committee Membership comprised three independent (i.e. non-Councillors) persons, one of whom (Mr Gordon Anderson) was the Chairman, two Conservative Group Members and one Labour Group Member.

Committee Meetings

3. The Committee met twice during the year, in June 2013 and October 2013 respectively. At the June meeting the Committee approved revisions to the Member and officer Protocol, principally to reflect the introduction of Portfolio Review Groups. The Committee also considered the threshold for registration of gifts and hospitality under the Code of Conduct for Members and approved minor amendments to the Council’s Whistle Blowing Policy consequent upon changes to Employment law made by the Regulatory Reform Act 2013.
4. The main work of the October meeting was the consideration and (subject to a number of minor amendments) endorsement of a completely revised Planning Protocol for Members formulated by the Code of Conduct Working Group. The meeting also approved a proposal to extend the definition of “Affected Persons” to include companies and limited liability partnerships which a Member or his/her spouse, and other connected persons is a director of/partner in.

Complaints

5. Under the procedures for the handling of complaints alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct for Members put in place following the enactment of the Localism Act 2011, a complaint is first considered by the Chairman of the Committee and the Monitoring Officer. The options available to the Chairman/Monitoring Officer at that stage are:-
 - refer for investigation
 - refer for some other form of action
 - determine that no further action is required.

If a complaint is referred for investigation the ensuing report is considered by the Chairman, the statutory independent person (statutory as in required to be

appointed by the Localism Act) and the Monitoring Officer. At that stage the options are:-

- refer to the Standards Committee for consideration
- refer for resolution by some other form of action (e.g. if the investigation finds that there has been a breach and the Member agrees to apologise)
- no further action required (investigation finds no breach which conclusion is agreed by the Chairman, independent person and Monitoring Officer)

6. During 2013/14 six complaints alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct for Members were received. In four instances the Chairman and the Monitoring Officer decided at the initial "filter" stage that no action was required. In relation to one of the complaints (that relating to charges for use of a mobile phone by the Leader of the Council) the Chairman and the Borough Solicitor determined that no further action was required against the Leader but following consultation with the Chief Executive it was agreed that the matters raised should be the subject of an independent review of mobile telephone use by Councillors and officers. The outcome of that review and the implementation of the resulting Action Plan were subsequently reported to the Governance and Audit Committee. One complaint (against a Member of Sandhurst Town Council) was referred for investigation. The investigation concluded that the Member the subject of the complaint had not contravened the Code but expressed concerns as to the conduct of another Town Council Member and governance issues at the Town Council. Following consideration of the investigation report it was decided that no action should be taken in respect of the complaint but that the Monitoring Officer should issue guidance to the other Member involved and to the Town Council. Both actions have been implemented.