
Annual Report of the Standards Committee

Introduction

- 1** This report outlines the activities of the Committee from May 2017 to April 2018 and records issues the Committee considers important for the future. In summary, the work of the Standards Committee is:
 - (1) Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct.
 - (2) Casework conducted through Sub-Committees
 - (3) Ensuring that appropriate training is organised for members.
 - (4) Overseeing Council policies on complaints handling and whistle blowing.

Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct

- 2** The promotion of high standards of conduct was principally demonstrated through the comprehensive training provided for members and the casework undertaken. Following the County Council elections in May 2017, a comprehensive induction programme included sessions on standards and the Code of Conduct, including an initial introduction for new members on 16 May 2017, then workshop training for all members during June 2017, undertaken by the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer. Only one member was unable to attend a workshop and this member attended a meeting with the Monitoring Officer to undergo the training.
- 3** All members newly elected in May 2017 submitted their register of interests forms by 24 May 2017. All members have been reminded to keep their register of interests up to date and many updates have been recorded over the last year. Advice was given by the Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services staff to assist members in making complete and correct entries. The most recent reminder to all members was issued in May 2018, after the local elections in some parts of the county.

Independent Person

- 4** The role of the independent persons has been confirmed as to assist the County Council in ensuring and maintaining a high level of integrity in the conduct of the elected members of the council and in how they discharge the council's business, through the implementation of the member Code of Conduct and the constitutional arrangements supporting it. A major part of the role is to advise the Standards Committee's sub-committees in casework.
- 5** Mr John Donaldson and Mr Steve Cooper have undertaken the role of Independent Person over the last year, including involvement in individual casework and commenting on government consultations being considered by the Committee.

Casework

- 6 In the period 1 May 2017 to 31 April 2018 two cases were considered. An Assessment Sub-Committee took place on 26 June 2017, comprising Mr Barnard (Chairman), Mr R J Oakley and Mr Smytherman and it reconvened on 31 August 2017. The members concerned were not found to have breached the Code of Conduct. The second Assessment Sub-Committee took place on 21 November 2017 and a subsequent Hearing Sub-Committee took place on 20 March 2018. The membership of the Sub-Committees was Mr Barnard (Chairman), Mr Smytherman and Mrs Sparkes on both occasions. Mr Cooper acted as the Independent Person to the Sub-Committee. The member was found to have breached the Code of Conduct and complied in full with the sanctions made by the Sub-Committee.
- 7 It is clear that familiarity with the Code helps members feel more confident in their role. Early discussion with the Monitoring Officer about potentially problematic situations is both encouraged and useful. The low number of cases is an indication of the effectiveness of the training and guidance given and of members' positive approach to standards of conduct.

Ethical Governance, Whistle Blowing and Complaints Handling

- 8 The Committee receives reports on any cases under the County Council's confidential reporting policy (CRP or 'whistleblowing'). The reports are helpful in indicating whether any measures are needed to address underlying problems. There have been five cases in the last year.
- 9 The Committee also receives regular reports about complaints handling across the authority. This year, the Committee has been briefed on revisions to complaints handling, aimed at giving a more consistent service to customers and making monitoring more effective. Generally there is a positive culture within the organisation about complaints and levels of complaints were broadly stable.

Conclusion

- 10 It is clear that maintaining good standards of conduct is taken seriously in the County Council. The Standards Committee believes that this can only serve to improve public confidence.

Recommended

That the report be noted.

Lionel Barnard

Chairman

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Background Papers: None