



Standards Committee
Annual Report 2024/25

Standards Committee Annual Report 2021/22

Foreword from the Chair of the Standards Committee

The work of the Standards Committee remains central to the ethical and governance responsibilities of the Council which are an essential element in local government continuing to retain the trust of the public which it serves.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Members on the Committee, the Independent Persons and officers of the Council, for their continued hard work and support in the work of the Committee during the year.

Mrs Ruth Jaffray

Co-opted Member

The Annual Report outlines the work of the Standards Committee during the municipal year 2024/25 and covers the following subjects:

- 1 Chair and Co-optees of the Standards Committee 2024/25;
- 2 Independent Persons;
- 3 Complaints received during 2024/25;
- 4 Councillor Complaint Procedure;
- 5 Consideration of requests for dispensations;
- 6 Constitution Review Work;
- 7 Policy Review;
- 8 Member Training Attendance.

1 Chair and Co-optees of Standards Committee 2024/25

The Articles of the Constitution require that a co-opted member be appointed Chair of the Standards Committee. The Council therefore approved the

appointment of Mrs Ruth Jaffray in November 2016 who has undertaken that role since then.

2 Independent Persons

The Council has two Independent Persons who advises the Monitoring Officer on complaints against District or Parish Councillors and also advises Councillors who were the subject of complaints. These are Mr Stephen Wainwright and Mr Ian Kirk.

3 Complaints received during the period May 2024 to May 2025

From the start of May 2024 the Monitoring Officer has received 22 complaints. This is a significant increase on last year when only 8 were received. 5 complaints related to the action of a district councillor and 17 relating to parish councillors. Most incidents are relatively minor and where a potential breach was identified they were dealt with through informal methods such as an apology. Other more serious complaints are dealt with by an informal investigation and one complaint has been through the investigation process. This resulted in an apology from the councillor concerned which was considered to be a proportionate way to conclude the complaint

4 Councillor Complaint Procedure

In November Standards Committee approved changes to the Councillor Complaint Procedure. This is the procedure undertaken when a complaint is made that a district or parish councillor has breached a relevant code of conduct. Under the procedure once a complaint has been investigated and the investigator recommends that there has been a breach of the code, the matter can be dealt with informally or by way of a hearing. Under the previous procedure before determining that a formal hearing was not required the Monitoring Officer was essentially required to seek approval from the complainant. This meant that where the Monitoring Officer did not believe that a formal hearing was appropriate a complainant could still force a hearing to take place. This took away the discretion of the Monitoring Officer and put disproportionate control in the hands of the complainant. Standards Committee addressed this imbalance and approved changes to the procedure that gave the Monitoring Officer the discretion to refer a complaint for a formal hearing. This change is in line with guidance issued by the Local Government Association.

5 Consideration of requests for Dispensation.

In January we considered a request from councillors who are also directors of the Council's Dragonfly companies to be able to speak and vote on decisions relating to the Council's budget. This was because they had a registerable interest in the budget due to their directorships. In addition the request asked for a wider dispensation to enable the councillors to be able to speak on local government reorganisation issues that affect Dragonfly. Whereas we were happy to grant the dispensation to enable those councillors to take part in budget debates and

decision we were not prepared to grant a wider dispensation. However we will consider the individual merits of dispensation requests on a case-by-case basis.

6 Constitution Review Work

One of the functions of the Standards Committee is to undertake a review of the Council's Constitution to ensure it is up to date and in line with legislation and current circumstances. The Committee considered a number of areas that had been identified for review including;

- Amendments to the code of conduct]
- Disestablishment of the Employment & Personnel Committee

7 Policy Review Work

Whistle-blowing Policy Review

The Council is committed to updating the Whistle-blowing policy on a regular basis to ensure it is fit for purpose and a review was conducted in January 2024 with no substantive changes being made other than housekeeping amendments.

The Monitoring Officer has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of the policy and would maintain a record of any concerns raised and the outcomes. The Monitoring Officer is also required to report as necessary to the Council on instances relating to Whistleblowing. It was noted by the Standards Committee at its meeting in January, that the policy was fit for purpose and there had been no instances of whistle blowing since the 2024 annual review.

RIPA Policy Review

In September we undertook a review of its RIPA Policy. This is the policy that regulates how the Council uses its powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2000 in relation to use of surveillance. We have also received a update on the use of investigatory powers and were informed that no such powers were used.

8 Gifts and Hospitality

- 8.1 The Council's Constitution specifies detailed arrangements for the registering of gifts and hospitality made to Members and officers.
- 8.2 The annual reporting of offers of gifts and hospitality made to Members and officers ensures that the Council's performance on this matter is monitored on a regular basis and that any changes in procedure can be introduced if necessary. The register of Gifts and Hospitality is also published on the Council's website.
- 8.3 In January this year, the Standards Committee received and noted an annual report in respect of offers of gifts and hospitality made to Members and officers for the period January 2024 to December 2025.

- 8.4 Members are reminded that advice is available from the Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer and Legal Services in relation to any offer of gift or hospitality and Members and officers are encouraged to seek this advice where they were unsure.

9 Member Training Attendance

Part of the Terms of Reference of the Standards Committee is to oversee Members training including attendance at courses. We noted that the attendance at training provided was not as high as it should have been. The Monitoring Officer has agreed to discuss how to improve training attendance with the Council's Member Development Champion. Further we have suggested establishing a full training programme which is notified to Members in advance, holding evening training sessions and providing on-line training.

Footnote: If any Member would like a copy of any of the reports referred to in this report, they should contact the Governance Team on 01246 242528