

Subject:	Standards Update		
Date of Meeting:	10 March 2020		
Report of:	Executive Lead Officer, Strategy, Governance & Law (Monitoring Officer)		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

1.1 This report seeks to update Members on Standards-related matters.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Committee note the information provided in this Report on Member complaints and on standards-related matters.

3. MEMBER COMPLAINTS, including PROPOSAL FOR AN ANNUAL UPDATE REPORT**MEMBER COMPLAINTS**

3.1 Information was provided in [the last update to this Committee](#) regarding the resolution of a number of complaints. At the time of that last update, only complaints designated E and H remained outstanding.

3.2 A rescheduled date has been set aside toward the end of March for a dedicated Standards Panel to be convened to determine **Complaint E**.

3.3 **Complaint H** has been the subject of ongoing communications in recent months. The complaint was initially framed as being against two current councillors in different party Groups. While it alleged amongst other things complicity by those councillors in an alleged fraud perpetrated by council officers, the complainant subsequently made an additional wide-ranging complaint about the conduct of all council departments. When it was not possible to clarify the specifics of the complaint despite a face to face meeting with the complainant, no further action was taken at preliminary assessment stage.

3.4 One new complaint has been received at the time of writing, and has been designated **Complaint K**. That complaint relates to one elected member, and alleges that – when purporting to act in an entirely separate capacity – that councillor acted in such a way as to bring their office into disrepute. This complaint remains at preliminary assessment stage, and will be the subject of future report(s) to this Committee.

PROPOSAL FOR AN ANNUAL UPDATE REPORT

- 3.5 It has been proposed that this Committee receive an annual report on member complaints which both provides statistical information and also identifies any recurrent themes or issues. It is considered that this will ensure greater transparency in this area of the Committee's responsibilities and will thereby ensure a more effective and visible discharge of this Committee's duty to promote high standards of conduct amongst members.

4. INDEPENDENT PERSON RECRUITMENT

- 4.1 This Committee will be aware that Section 28(7) of the Localism Act 2011 requires the council to appoint at least one Independent Person whose views are to be sought in relation to member conduct issues. This Council has chosen to co-opt two Independent Persons, whose (non-voting) role on the council's Audit and Standards Committee is key both to meeting statutory requirements in relation to standards are met and also to ensuring that effective audit and governance arrangements are maintained.
- 4.2 While the most recently appointed Independent Person was appointed by full Council in March 2019, the longest serving appointee's tenure will come to a close on 24th October 2020. Dr Horne's contribution in this key role has been significant and will be noted in a future report to this Committee. For the time being, this Committee is asked to note that a recruitment process to appoint a new (second) Independent Person will begin in early summer 2020. That process will be member-led and will involve the external advertisement of this key role. While advertising externally is a legal requirement, it is moreover considered to be essential in order to attract public-minded candidates who both have the requisite skills and experience and are (crucially) independent of the council.
- 4.3 Updates will be provided to this Committee on the recruitment when available.

5. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 5.1 The Council is obliged under the Localism Act to make arrangements for maintaining high standards of conduct among members and to make arrangements for the investigation of complaints. The current arrangements and the proposals in this Report reflect this. No alternative proposals are suggested.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 6.1 No need to consult with the local community has been identified.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this Report, which aims to assist the Committee in discharging its responsibilities for overseeing that high standards of conduct are maintained in a way which is compliant with local requirements.

8. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 8.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from the recommendation in this Report. All activity referred to has been, or will be, met from existing budgets.

Finance Officer Consulted: James Hengeveld

Date: 24/02/20

Legal Implications:

- 8.2 These are covered in the body of the Report.

Lawyer Consulted: Victoria Simpson

Date: 5/02/20

Equalities Implications:

- 8.3 There are no equalities implications arising from this Report

Sustainability Implications:

- 8.4 There are no sustainability implications arising from this Report

Any Other Significant Implications:

- 8.5 None

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

None

Background Documents:

None

