

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

30 JUNE 2022

Present: Councillors Haffenden (Chair), Edwards, Pragnell and Roberts. Independent Persons: Amanda McIntyre and John Baker. Officers: Mary Kilner, Monitoring Officer.

49. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence received from Kirsty Cameron, Deputy Monitoring Officer.

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

51. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2022 be approved by the Chair as a true record.

52. ANNUAL REPORT

The Monitoring Officer presented a report to advise on the activities of the Standards Committee for 2021-22.

The last Annual Standards Committee meeting was held on 22nd September 2021. Since then there were five individual complaints against the same Councillor received by the Monitoring Officer which were determined at a full hearing of the Standards Committee in February 2022.

There have also been three complaints received by the Monitoring Officer concerning the behaviour of a Councillor at a public rally. The Monitoring Officer postponed dealing with the complaints as they were received during the pre-election period. Two of the complainants did not return the Standards Complaint Form, and there is one complaint outstanding which the Monitoring Officer is currently reviewing. The views of the Independent Persons will be sought when considering whether to take the complaint forward.

The Standards Assessment Committee met in December 2021 and a full Standards Committee hearing in February 2022 to deal with and determine the five complaints against the same Councillor. The Standards Committee determined that there was a breach of the code and resolved that the Councillor should undertake one-to-one training on social media and the Code of Conduct. The Committee also requested that all attendees respect the confidentiality of the complainants and the Councillors involved given safeguarding concerns.

RESOLVED:

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1. To note the contents of the report.

Reasons:

1. To keep the Standards Committee advised of past complaints.
2. To keep under review the Standards Committee complaints procedures and improve the way the Councils deals with complaints about elected members.

53. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

John Baker suggested the Committee consider targets for dealing with the different stages of a complaint. The parties involved can justifiably feel that it takes a long time for the process to be worked through, and this could give some indication of the timeframe for dealing with a complaint.

The Monitoring Officer agreed that complaints should move forward as quickly as possible, but this is often dependent on getting responses from those involved who often find the complaints stressful as well as obtaining further information and evidence in relation to the complaint. Amanda McIntyre suggested that the process could be improved by ensuring all parties are regularly updated on the progress of complaints so they can understand why there might be delays.

John Baker noted that when two councillors have submitted complaints against each other both parties are offered access to one of the Independent Persons to provide information on the process. Is there a way that similar support can be given to councillors who make a complaint but are not the subject of a complaint themselves? The Monitoring Officer said it would be possible to call on an Independent Person or officer from another authority to provide support if required.

Amanda McIntyre suggested the Committee draw up a protocol setting out the role of the Independent Person to formalise the process.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at 6.22pm)