

# STANDARDS COMMITTEE

29 JUNE 2016

## REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

### A.1 STANDARDS COMMITTEE - ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

(Report prepared by Lisa Hastings, Monitoring Officer)

#### PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

##### PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To agree a work plan for 2016/17 and to provide comment on reviewing the Members' Code of Conduct and Monitoring Officer Protocol.

##### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Standards Framework comprises of:

- The Members' Code of Conduct (contained within the Members' Constitution Booklet);
- The Monitoring Officer Protocol (contained within the Members' Constitution Booklet);
- The Independent Persons' Protocol (contained within the Members' Constitution Booklet);
- Member and Officer Relations Protocol (contained within the Members' Constitution Booklet); and
- The Complaints Procedure (contained within the Members' Constitution Booklet).

These documents collectively fulfil the Council's statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and to building public confidence by demonstrating a commitment to maintaining positive behaviours in relation to all seven principles of public life.

The overall approach of the arrangements is to seek:

- Information and training for Members and Officers to increase awareness and support good standards of behaviour;
- Proportionality – responses to complaints which are proportionate to their seriousness;
- Timeliness – with clear timescales for the various stages of complaints to be progressed;
- Checks, balances, reporting requirements and delegation to the Monitoring Officer of key elements of the process to maximise independence from the political process; and
- Early and informal intervention to resolve complaints wherever possible (including an expectation that Group Leaders will play a key role).

The Arrangements were adopted by full Council in November 2013, and elements have been reviewed in 2014, 2015 and 2016 to ensure that the procedures and protocols are robust, up to date and fit for purpose. The Members' Code of Conduct and the Monitoring

Officer Protocol have not been reviewed since adoption.

The Monitoring Officer believes that there maybe some merit in undertaking a light touch review of the Code and consider removing the distinction between Other and Non Pecuniary Interests by joining them together and reviewing the definitions. The 3 different types of interest do cause confusion with Members and the public and therefore, could be simpler. In addition, it has been raised whether the provisions on declarations of interests do go far enough and questions have been asked whether the Council should be retaining a register of interests. Matters such as membership of various groups or organisations cause concerns with elected members and the public that these are not registered, and whilst this is not required on a statutory basis, provisions could be included within the local code.

Nationally, a number of Councils have reviewed their codes since adoption, some in response to feedback on definitions or areas which were missing, or due to the lack of sanctions available if the obligations were compromised. New ideas such as voluntary acceptance of suspension and a recall scheme are emerging and information on these can be presented to the Committee through the review of the Code if agreed.

The Monitoring Officer also believes that it is appropriate and reasonable for the Protocol which sets out how the Monitoring Officer role should be performed be also subject to a review, in order to ensure that Members remain content and confident with the roles and responsibilities as set out.

To enable the Committee to focus on promoting high standards of conduct as well as reacting to complaints it is considered appropriate to discuss and agree a work plan for the Committee for 2016/17. A draft is enclosed as **Appendix 1**.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Standards Committee note the contents of the report and agree the annual work plan for 2016/17, as set out in Appendix 1 subject to the Committee's comments or amendments through debate.**

## **APPENDICES**

- Appendix 1 – Draft work plan for 2016/17

**DRAFT COMMITTEE WORK PLAN – STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**September 2016**

Commence review of Code of Conduct

Quarterly Complaints update by Monitoring Officer

**December 2016**

Finalise review of Code of Conduct

Update on Mandatory Training

Quarterly Complaints update by Monitoring Officer

**March 2017**

Annual Report on declarations of interest (meetings, gifts and hospitality)

Quarterly Complaint update by Monitoring Officer

Individual matters may be referred to these meetings by the Monitoring Officer in accordance with the Committee's Terms of Reference as necessary, for example an appeal against dispensation decision or code of conduct hearing.