

TENDRING DISTRICT COUNCIL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

1. Context

- 1.1 These “Arrangements” set out how you may make a complaint that an elected or co-opted member (with voting rights) of this Authority (‘Tendring District Council’ or of a Town or Parish Council within its area (see 1.3.below)) has failed to comply with the Member Code of Conduct, and sets out how the authority will deal with allegations of a failure to comply with the Member Code of Conduct.
- 1.2 Under **Section 28(6) and (7) of the Localism Act 2011**, Tendring District Council must have in place “arrangements” under which allegations that a Member or co-opted Member of the Authority (*or of a Town or Parish Council within the authority’s area*), or of a Committee or Sub-Committee of the Authority, has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct can be investigated and decisions made on such allegations.
- 1.3 Town and Parish Councils within the Tendring District are set out on the Council’s website.
- 1.4 Such arrangements must provide for the District Council to appoint at least one Independent Person, whose views must be sought by the Council before it takes a decision on an allegation against a Member, which it has decided shall be investigated, and whose views can be sought by the District Council at any other stage. The Council has adopted an Independent Person Protocol which sets out some general principles.

2. The Member Code of Conduct

- 2.1 The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct for Councillors, which is available on the website or on request from reception at the Council Offices.
- 2.2 Each Town or Parish Council is also required to adopt a Code of Conduct. If you wish to inspect a Town or Parish Council’s Code of Conduct, you should visit the website operated by the Town or Parish Council or request the Town or Parish Council Clerk to allow you to inspect the Town or Parish Council’s Code of Conduct.

3. Making a complaint

- 3.1 If you wish to make a complaint, please write to or email:

The Monitoring Officer, Tendring District Council
Corporate Services, Town Hall, Station Road
Clacton-on-Sea Essex CO15 1SE

standards@tendringdc.gov.uk

The Complaints Form can be downloaded from the website.

3.2 The Monitoring Officer is a senior officer of the authority who has statutory responsibility for maintaining the Register of Members' Interests and who is responsible for administering the system in respect of complaints of member misconduct. This information will be retained by the Council for a period of two years in accordance with its Retention and Destruction Policy. The Council has adopted a Monitoring Officer Protocol which sets out some general principles.

3.3 In order to ensure that we have all the information which we need to be able to process your complaint, please complete and send us the complaint form which is available on request from the reception at the Council Offices or via the website. You must also include all relevant information relating to the complaint which you have to enable it to be fully considered.

Please provide us with your name and a contact address or email address, so that we can acknowledge receipt of your complaint and keep you informed of its progress. The name and address of a complainant will be provided to the member that is the subject of the complaint. In exceptional cases, we may agree to withhold your name and address from the member. If you want to keep your name and address confidential, please indicate this in the space provided on the complaint form along with the reasons why you feel it is necessary for your name and address to be withheld. The Monitoring Officer will consider your request and if granted we will not disclose your name and address to the member against whom you make the complaint, without your prior consent.

3.4 The authority does not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless it includes sufficient documentary evidence to show a significant breach of the Code of Conduct and there is a clear public interest in doing so.

3.5 Following receipt of your complaint, the Monitoring Officer will: -

- (a) acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 10 working days of receiving it;
- (b) notify, within 10 working days, the member that is the subject of the complaint that you have made a complaint about them and provide them with the information set out on the complaint form; excluding any personal information but including your name and address, unless this is to be withheld in accordance with section 3.3 above; and
- (c) keep you and the Member that is the subject of the complaint informed of the progress of your complaint.
- (d) Your complaint will be given a reference number which will appear on complaint documentation to preserve the privacy of the complainant and the subject Member until the complaint outcome is determined.

3.6 The Complaints Procedure Flowchart is set out at the end of this procedure for reference.

3.7 The Complaints Procedure follows the principles of natural justice and the presumption of innocence until proven otherwise.

3.8 Both Parties are encouraged to keep the matter of the complaint confidential whilst it is progressing in accordance with this complaints procedure. The Monitoring Officer

will also adhere to this confidentiality and only inform/contact any such individuals which are identified in the procedure or by the parties. If the details of the complaint are made public, it may be necessary for a statement to be issued by the Monitoring Officer for clarification only.

4. Will your complaint be investigated?

4.1 The Monitoring Officer will review every complaint received and, may consult with one of the Independent Persons before taking a decision as to whether the complaint:

4.1.1 Merits no further action

4.1.2 Merits early informal resolution or mediation

4.1.3 Merits further investigation.

4.2 In reaching a decision in respect of how to progress the complaint the Monitoring Officer will take account of the following factors where appropriate:-

- Was the Member acting in their official capacity?
- Was the Member in office at the time of the alleged misconduct?
- Is the complaint of a very minor or trivial nature?
- Is the complaint vexatious or malicious?
- Are there historical matters?
- Is there a potential breach of the Code?
- Assessment of public interest?
- Is additional information required prior to making a decision?

4.3 The decision as to how the complaint is to be progressed will normally be taken within 15 working days of receipt of your complaint. Your complaint will be considered in accordance with the Assessment Criteria included at **Annex D (set out at the end of this procedure for reference)**.

Where the Monitoring Officer has taken a decision, you will be informed of the decision and the reasons for that decision. The Monitoring Officer may require additional information in order to come to a decision, and may come back to you for such information. In the absence of a response from you within 15 working days the Monitoring Officer may close the complaint. Information may be requested from the member against whom your complaint is directed to enable the Monitoring Officer to take the decision. In the absence of the subject Member's response within 15 working days the Monitoring Officer may proceed with the complaint.

Where your complaint relates to a Town or Parish Councillor, the Monitoring Officer *may* also inform the Town or Parish Council of your complaint and seek the views of the Town or Parish Council before deciding whether the complaint merits formal investigation.

Any failure to comply with the time scale by the Monitoring Officer or parties concerned will be notified to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee together with reasons for the delay and the member subject of the complaint and the complainant will be kept informed of progress and reasons for the delay.

- 4.4 In appropriate cases, the Monitoring Officer may seek to resolve the complaint informally through informal resolution, without the need for a formal investigation. Such informal resolution may involve notifying the Group Leader and the Member accepting that his/her conduct was unacceptable and/or offering an apology, and/or agreeing to mediation and/or other remedial action by the authority. Where the Member or the Authority make a reasonable offer of informal resolution, but you are not willing to accept the offer, the Monitoring Officer will take account of this in deciding whether the complaint merits further investigation.

Where the Member subject of the complaint is the Group Leader, appropriate alternative arrangements will be required for informal resolution or mediation; this will be dependent upon whether the Group has allocated a Deputy to undertake this role, involve the Group Leader directly or an independent individual or suitable alternative, depending upon the circumstances.

- 4.5 If your complaint identifies criminal conduct or breach of other regulation by any person, the Monitoring Officer has the power and obligation to notify or refer to the Police or other regulatory agencies.

5. Referral to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee and how is the Investigation conducted?

(The Committee and Sub-Committee Terms of Reference are included at **Annex C (set out at the end of this procedure for reference)**).

- 5.1 The Council has adopted a procedure for the investigation of misconduct complaints a summary of which is attached as **Annex E (set out at the end of this procedure for reference)**.

The Council has a Town and Parish Councils' Standards Sub-Committee which has responsibility for dealing with complaints regarding the actions of a Town or Parish Councillor, reference to the Sub-Committee throughout this procedure relates to the Town and Parish Council's Standards Sub-Committee.

- 5.2 If the Monitoring Officer decides that a complaint merits further investigation without referral to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee, he/she will commission the investigation to be undertaken by a suitably qualified investigator with requisite experience and may include another officer of the Council, a senior officer of another authority or an appropriately experienced consultant, ensuring that independence and impartiality is maintained.

When deciding that a complaint merits further investigation, the Monitoring Officer may, in exceptional circumstances, refer the matter to the Council's Standards Committee or Sub-Committee, with a recommendation together with any information received from either the complainant or member who is the subject of the complaint. The Committee or Sub-Committee, upon consideration of this recommendation and information, may decide that the complaint merits no further action, conciliation or similar resolution.

- 5.3 The Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer will decide whether he/she needs to meet you or speak to you to understand the nature of your complaint and so that you can explain your understanding of events and suggest what documents need to be seen and who needs to be interviewed. Any information supplied to the Monitoring Officer or Investigating Officer will be kept confidential within the remit of the investigation and therefore, maybe shared with the parties. It is important to note that if a hearing is required at a later date, and the Standards Committee is convened the information disclosed will be available to the public in accordance with the Access to Information legislation, which the Council has to abide by when conducting meetings.
- 5.4 As referred to in section 3.5, upon receipt of your complaint the member that is the subject of the complaint will ordinarily be informed that you have made a complaint about them and will be provided with details of the complaint. If an investigation is to be undertaken, the Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer will normally write to the Member against whom you have complained and provide him/her with full details of your complaint, (including your name and address but excluding any additional or sensitive personal information) and formally ask the member to provide his/her explanation of events, and to identify what documents he needs to see and who he needs to interview. In exceptional cases, where it is felt appropriate to continue to keep your identity confidential or where disclosure of details of the complaint to the Member might prejudice the investigation, the Monitoring Officer can delete your name and address from the papers given to the member, or delay providing full details of the complaint to the member until the investigation has progressed sufficiently.
- 5.5 At the end of his/her investigation, the Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer will produce a draft report ("the Investigation Report") and will, in all cases, send copies of that draft report, in confidence, to you and to the Member concerned, to give you both an opportunity to identify any matters in that draft report which you disagree with or which you consider requires more consideration.
- 5.6 Having received and taken account of any comments which you, or the Member that is the subject of the complaint, may make on the draft Investigation Report, the report will be finalised. Where an Investigating Officer has been appointed the Investigating Officer will send his/her final report to the Monitoring Officer together with a conclusion as to whether the evidence supports a finding of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.
- 6. What happens if the Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer concludes that there is no evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct?**
- 6.1 If an Investigating Officer has been appointed, the Monitoring Officer will review the Investigating Officer's report and may consult with the Independent Person(s). If he/she is satisfied that the Investigating Officer's report is sufficient, subject to 6.3 below, the Monitoring Officer will write to you and to the member concerned (*and, if appropriate, to the Town and Parish Council, where your complaint relates to a Town or Parish Councillor*), notifying you that he/she is satisfied that no further action is required, and give you both a copy of the Investigation Final Report. The Monitoring

Officer will also notify the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee and the relevant Independent Person.

- 6.2 If an Investigating Officer has been appointed and if the Monitoring Officer is not satisfied that the investigation has been conducted properly, he/she may ask the Investigating Officer to reconsider his/her report.
- 6.3 The Monitoring Officer, may at their own discretion and only in exceptional cases, following consultation with the Chief Executive, decide to refer cases to the Committee for determination where the outcome of an investigation was to recommend no breach of the Code of Conduct. Exceptional cases may include but not limited to matters where the evidence is so finely balanced or is in the public interest to do so.

7. What happens if the Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer concludes that there is evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct?

- 7.1 If an Investigating Officer has been appointed the Monitoring Officer will review the Investigating Officer's report and will then either refer the matter for a hearing before the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee or in consultation with one of the Independent Persons seek an informal resolution or mediation.

7.1.1 Informal Resolution

The Monitoring Officer may consider that the matter can reasonably be resolved without the need for a hearing. In such a case, he/she will consult with one of the Independent Persons and with you as complainant and seek to agree what you consider to be a fair resolution which also helps to ensure higher standards of conduct for the future. Such resolution may include the Member accepting that his/her conduct was unacceptable and/or offering an apology, and/or mediation and/or other remedial action by the Authority. If the Member complies with the suggested resolution, the Monitoring Officer will report the matter to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee (*and the Town or Parish Council*) for information, but will take no further action.

7.1.2 Hearing

If the Monitoring Officer considers that informal resolution is not appropriate, or the councillor concerned is not prepared to undertake any proposed remedial action, such as giving an apology, then the Monitoring Officer will report the Investigation Report to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee which will conduct a hearing before deciding whether the Member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct and, if so, whether to take any action in respect of the member.

To conduct a hearing, the Standards Committee must be convened and a Committee Agenda and Report is published and available for public and press inspection, however, the Investigators Report will be kept confidential and will remain in Part B, until the day of the hearing to protect the parties.

At the hearing, following the Council's procedures, a copy of which will be provided, the Investigating Officer or the Monitoring Officer will present his/her report, call such witnesses as he/she considers necessary and make representations to substantiate his/her conclusion that the member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct. For this purpose, the Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer may ask you as the complainant to attend and give evidence to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee. The Member will then have an opportunity to give his/her evidence, to call witnesses and to make representations to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee as to why he/she considers that he/she did not fail to comply with the Code of Conduct.

The Members of the Standards or Sub-Committee, after hearing all the evidence and information, may adjourn the meeting for a short period and deliberate together in private. The hearing will then be reconvened and the Decision will be announced in public. It is expected that this will usually be on the same day.

The Standards Committee or Sub-Committee, with the benefit of any comments or advice from one of the Independent Persons, may conclude that the Member did not fail to comply with the Code of Conduct, and dismiss the complaint. If the decision is contrary to a recommendation from the Investigating Officer and/or Monitoring Officer, detailed reasons will be required to be published in the Decision Notice. The Decision of the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee will also be reported to the next meeting of Full Council.

If the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee concludes that the Member did fail to comply with the Code of Conduct, the Chairman will inform the Member of this finding and the Committee or Sub-Committee will then consider what action, if any, the Committee or Sub-Committee should take as a result of the Member's failure to comply with the Code of Conduct. In doing this, the Committee or Sub-Committee will give the Member an opportunity to make representations and will consult the Independent Person, but will then decide what action, if any, to take in respect of the matter.

8. What action might the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee take where a member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct?

8.1 The Standards Committee or Sub-Committee has the power to take action in respect of individual Members as may be relevant and proportionate, and necessary to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. Accordingly the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee may:-

8.1.1 Publish its findings in respect of the Member's conduct on the Council's website;

8.1.2 Report its findings to Council (*or to the Town or Parish Council*) for information;

- 8.1.3 Recommend to the Member's Group Leader (or in the case of un-grouped members, recommend to Council or to Committee) that he/she be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council;
 - 8.1.4 Recommend to the Leader of the Council that the Member be removed from the Cabinet, or removed from particular Portfolio responsibilities;
 - 8.1.5 Instruct the Monitoring Officer to *(or recommend that the Town or Parish Council)* arrange training for the member;
 - 8.1.6 Recommend to the relevant Group Leader (or in the case of un-grouped members, recommend to Council or to Committee) that the Member be removed *(or recommend to the Town or Parish Council that the Member be removed)* from all outside appointments to which he/she has been appointed or nominated by the authority *(or by the Town or Parish Council)*;
 - 8.1.7 Recommend to relevant Group Leader (or in the case of un-grouped members, recommend to Council or to Committee) the withdrawal of *(or recommend to the Town or Parish Council that it withdraws)* facilities provided to the member by the Council, such as a computer, website and/or email and internet access; or
 - 8.1.8 Recommend to the relevant Group Leader (or in the case of un-grouped members, recommend to Council or to Committee) the exclusion of *(or recommend that the Town or Parish Council exclude)* the Member from the Council's Offices or other premises, with the exception of meeting rooms as necessary for attending Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings.
- 8.2 In each circumstance, where the Member subject of the complaint is the Group Leader, appropriate alternative arrangements will be required, this will be dependent upon whether the Group has allocated a Deputy to undertake this role, involve the Group Leader directly or an independent individual or suitable alternative, depending upon the circumstances.
 - 8.3 In each circumstance, where the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee recommend the Group Leaders take action, it is expected that the Group Leader will within 6 weeks of the referral to them, or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter, submit a report back to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee giving details of the action taken or proposed to comply with the Committee's direction.
 - 8.4 The Standards Committee or Sub-Committee has no power to suspend or disqualify the Member or to withdraw Members' special responsibility allowances.

9. What happens at the end of the hearing?

- 9.1 At the end of the hearing, the Chairman will state the decision of the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee as to whether the Member failed to comply with the Code of Conduct and as to any actions which the Committee or Sub-Committee resolves to take.
- 9.2 Within 5 days, the Monitoring Officer shall prepare a formal Decision Notice in consultation with the relevant Chairman of the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee, and send a copy to you and to the Member *(and to the Town or Parish*

Council if appropriate), make that Decision Notice available for public inspection and, report the decision to the next convenient meeting of the Council for information.

- 9.3 Should a police investigation result in a Member being convicted of a criminal offence the Monitoring Officer in consultation with an Independent will determine whether it is in the public interest for the matter to be reported to Council for information. In such circumstances the Group Leader will also be consulted and notified of the decision accordingly.

10. Who forms the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee?

- 10.1 The Standards Committee will comprise of 7 District Councillors;
- 10.2 The Standards Town and Parish Sub-Committee will compromise of 3 District Councillors and 3 Town and Parish Councillors (nominated by the Association of Local Councils);
- 10.3 At least one of the three Independent Persons must have been consulted on their views and taken into consideration before the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee takes any decision on whether the member's conduct constitutes a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and as to any action to be taken following a finding of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.

11. Who are the Independent Persons?

- 11.1 The Council has appointed two Independent Persons to support the Standards Committee and Sub-Committee.
- 11.2 An Independent Person is a person who has applied for the post following advertisement of a vacancy for the post, and is appointed by a positive vote from a majority of all the members of Council.
- 11.3 Section 28 (8) of the Localism Act 2011 provides the definition and restriction of the Independent Person. The Council has adopted an Independent Person Protocol which sets out some general principles.

12. Revision of these arrangements

The Council may by resolution agree to amend these arrangements, upon the advice of the Monitoring Officer where it is necessary, fair, proportionate and expedient to do so.

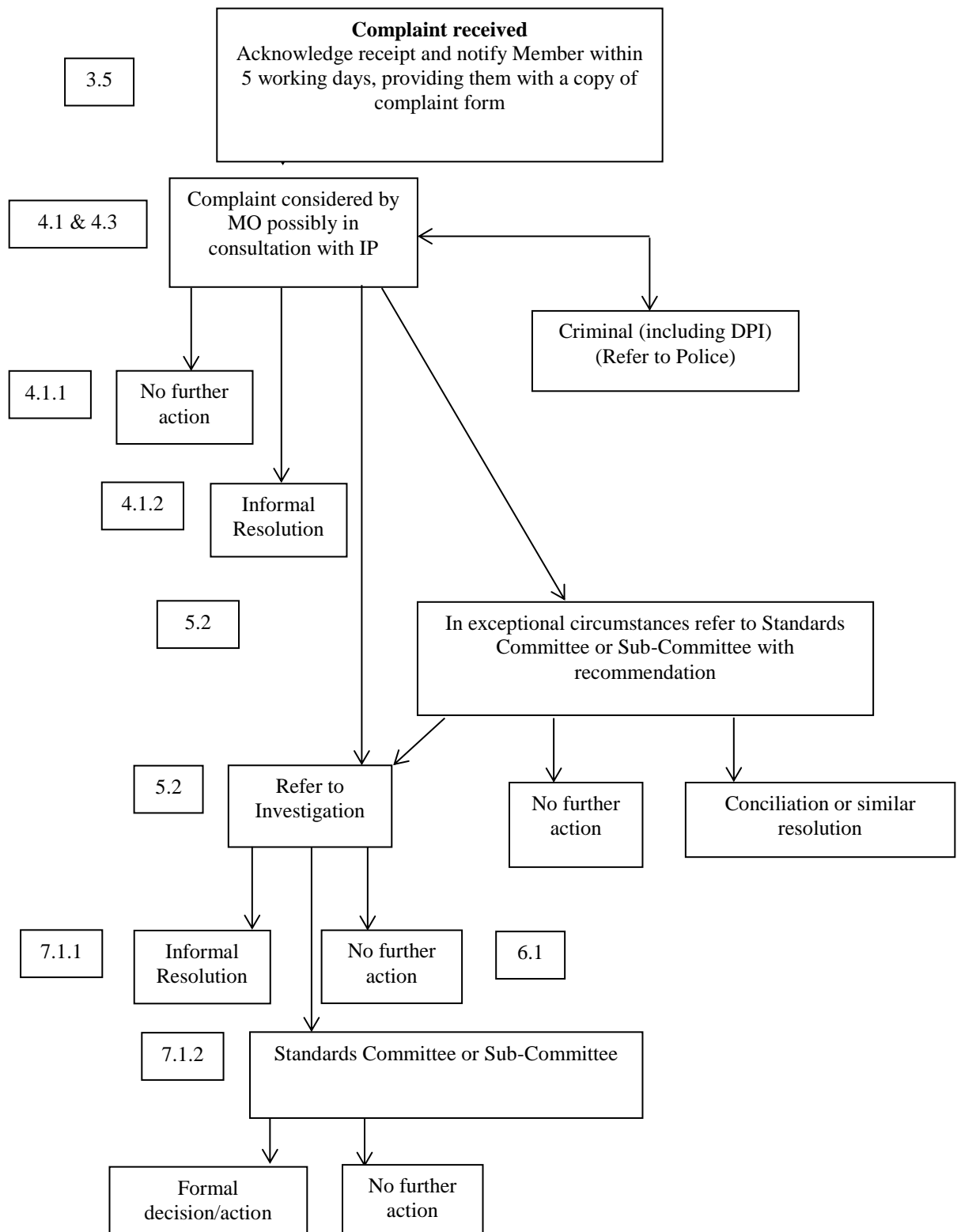
13. Appeals

- 13.1 There is no right of appeal for you as complainant or for the member against a decision of the Monitoring Officer or of the Standards Committee.
- 13.2 If you feel that the authority has failed to deal with your complaint properly, you may make a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

ANNEX B

This Flowchart is to be read in conjunction with the Tendring District Council's Complaints Procedure

(Reference is made to the relevant paragraphs of the Procedure in the boxes on the left hand side)



ANNEX D

CONDUCT COMPLAINTS ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Complaints which would not normally be referred for investigation or to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee

1. The complaint is not considered sufficiently serious to warrant investigation;
2. The complaint appears to be simply motivated by malice or is “tit-for-tat”;
3. The complaint appears to be politically motivated;
4. It appears that there can be no breach of the Code of Conduct; for example that it relates to the Councillor’s private life or is about dissatisfaction with a Council decision;
5. It is about someone who is no longer a Councillor
6. There is insufficient information available;
7. The complaint has not been received within 3 months of the alleged misconduct unless there are exceptional circumstances, e.g. an allegation of bullying, harassment etc.
8. The matter occurred so long ago that it would be difficult for a fair investigation to be carried out;
9. The same, or similar, complaint has already been investigated and there is nothing further to be gained by seeking the sanctions available to the Standards Committee;
10. It is an anonymous complaint, unless it includes sufficient documentary evidence to show a significant breach of the Code of Conduct; or
11. Where the member complained of has apologised and/or admitted making an error and the matter would not warrant a more serious sanction.

Complaints which may be referred for investigation and/or to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee

1. It is serious enough, if proven, to justifying the range of sanctions available to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee; or
2. There are individual acts of minor misconduct which appear to be a part of a continuing pattern of behaviour that is unreasonably disrupting the business of the Council and there is no other avenue left to deal with it other than by way of an investigation; or
3. When the complaint comes from a senior officer of the Council, such as the Chief Executive or the Monitoring Officer and it would be difficult for the Monitoring Officer to consider; or
4. The complaint is about a high profile Member such as the Leader of the Council and it would be difficult for the Monitoring Officer to consider; or
5. Such other complaints as the Monitoring Officer considers it would not be appropriate for him/her to consider.

Whilst complainants must be confident that complaints are taken seriously and dealt with appropriately, deciding to investigate a complaint or to take further action will cost both public money and officers’ and Members’ time. This is an important consideration where the complaint is relatively minor.

ANNEX E

STANDARDS COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATION PROCEDURE

Members are reminded that they are required to co-operate with the investigation process as part of their compliance with the Code of conduct and to ensure that the procedure is undertaken in an efficient and resourceful manner.

1. Planning Stage:

Upon receipt of an instruction to carry out an investigation the Investigator should :-

- Acknowledge receipt of the instruction to conduct the investigation.
- Maintain a written record throughout the investigation.
- Assess whether any additional information is required from the complainant.
- Identify the paragraph(s) of the Member Code of Conduct that are alleged to have been breached.
- Identify the facts which will need to be determined to establish if the Member has breached the Member Code of Conduct.
- Identify the evidence that is needed to determine the issues.
- Consider how to undertake the evidence gathering.
- Identify how long it is likely to take to conduct the investigation.
- Tendring District Council has imposed a 3 month deadline for an investigation to be completed; this may be reduced by the Monitoring Officer in each individual case. The Investigating Officer must confirm that the deadline is achievable and regularly update the Monitoring Officer, subject member of the complainant and the complaint as to progress.

2. Evidence Gathering Stage:

- Contact the complainant to request any supporting or documentary evidence relating to the complaint.
- Contact the subject member with details of the complaint and seek an explanation.
- If new evidence is obtained through the investigation that the subject member has not been made aware of, this should be provided to the Councillor to respond to either orally or in writing.

3. Interview Stage:

- Identify witnesses.
- Arrange interview dates.
- Conduct interviews (preferably in the order of: the complainant, witnesses and subject member and any of their witnesses).
- The investigating Officer when interviewing the subject member; must ask them to respond to each point of the complaint and alleged breach of the Code of Conduct.
- The Investigating Officer should make every effort to gather evidence from the Complainant and subject member by way of a face to face interview.

4. Report Stage:

- Review evidence from interviews and any documentary evidence provided.
- Draft the report to contain:-
 - Details of who was interviewed, who supplied information and whether through written documentation or verbally;
 - Agreed facts;
 - Facts not agreed and corresponding conflicting evidence;
 - An assessment of all of the alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct forming the complaint and those identified by the Monitoring Officer or Investigator;
 - Conclusions as to whether a breach has occurred.
 - Where a draft report is issued this will be supplied to both the complainant and subject member for comment, in addition to the Monitoring Officer.

In all cases the Investigator will issue a final report and the Monitoring Officer will then determine appropriate action to be taken in line with the report conclusion