

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Standards Committee was held on Monday 14 October 2024.

PRESENT: Councillor A Romaine (Chair), I Morrish (Vice-Chair), J Ewan, L Lewis and J Thompson

OFFICERS: Susan Lightwing and Catherine Cunningham

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: were submitted on behalf of Councillors D Davison, M Saunders and M Smiles

24/6 **WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair read out the Fire Evacuation Procedure and welcomed all present to the meeting.

24/7 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest at this point in the meeting.

24/8 **MINUTES- STANDARDS COMMITTEE - 8 JULY 2024**

The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 8 July 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

24/9 **QUARTERLY UPDATE REPORT TO STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

A report of the Director of Legal Services was presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer, to provide a quarterly update to the Standards Committee in relation to the recent and current position concerning Code of Conduct Complaints.

There were 59 complaints in 2023. Of those complaints 9 were withdrawn or discontinued, 30 were advised to be rejected based on the assessment criteria, 14 were resolved informally by way of advice and guidance and 6 were being investigated.

In relation to 1 of those 6 complaints, information was awaited from external sources to finalise the investigation. The remaining 5 complaints related to the same social media incident and the same Member, which were being investigated along with subsequent complaints of a similar nature in 2024, to ensure the issues were considered as a whole.

There had been 12 complaints so far in 2024. Six complaints had been rejected, and 6 complaints had been accepted. Out of the 6 accepted complaints, 3 related to the same Member in relation to social media posts and were being considered together with complaints made in 2023. Two complaints were received in relation to a Member's social media posts and 1 complaint was again in respect of a Member's social media post and comments made.

Although complaints were logged separately, the statistics and information could show how separate complaints might relate to the same incident or subject matter, which had caused concern to a number of Councillors and/or members of the public.

As discussed previously at Standards Committee, the common prevalent theme of the complaints was inappropriate use of social media. Training was therefore being identified and organised in relation to the Council's social media policy, social media use and the impact on Members' Code of Conduct. This included the use of private social media accounts where a Member could be acting in their capacity as a Councillor.

It was accepted by the Deputy Monitoring Officer that there had been delays in relation to processing standards complaints to their completion. The delays were generally due to staffing changes within the Directorate and were currently being addressed. A locum Governance Officer had been appointed for a set period to look at the Constitution and governance, and also to review the process for standards complaints.

Members raised issues in relation to the timelines for processing standards complaints and

multiple complaints in relation to the same Members.

AGREED as follows that the:

1. the information provided was received and noted.
2. Deputy Monitoring Officer would provide statistical information at the next meeting in relation to the numbers of Members who had multiple complaints made against them.

24/10

LOCALISM ACT 2011 - GENERAL DISPENSATION

A report of the Director of Legal and Governance and Monitoring Officer was presented, the purpose of which was to enable a general dispensation to be granted to those Elected Members who had applied for a dispensation in respect of matters that might affect so many Councillors that the Council or Committee would be inquorate.

Councillors L Henman and L Young had both requested a dispensation. The dispensation would allow both Members to participate fully in a meeting whenever the following matters were discussed:

- a) Housing; where the member (or spouse or partner) holds a tenancy or lease with the Council as long as the matter does not relate to the member's particular tenancy or lease;
- b) Housing Benefit; where the member (or spouse or partner) receives Housing Benefit;
- c) Statutory sick pay; if a Councillor receives this or is entitled to receive it;
- d) An allowance, travelling expense, payment or indemnity for Councillors;
- e) Any ceremonial honour given to members.

AGREED as follows that:

1. Standards Committee granted a general dispensation to Councillors L Henman and L Young in respect of matters that might affect so many Councillors that the Council or Committee would be inquorate.
2. The general dispensation be applied for the maximum permitted period of 4 years from the date of this decision.

24/11

ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED

None.