

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Standards Committee was held on Monday 7 April 2025.

PRESENT: Councillors Anne Romaine (Chair), I Morrish (Vice-Chair), D Davison, J Ewan, J Thompson and G Wilson

OFFICERS: Joanne McNally, Catherine Cunningham and Ann-Marie Wilson

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor L Lewis

24/12 **WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the Fire Evacuation Procedure.

24/13 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

24/14 **MINUTES- STANDARDS COMMITTEE - 14 OCTOBER 2024**

The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 14 October 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

24/15 **QUARTERLY UPDATE REPORT TO STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

A report of the Director of Legal and Governance Services was presented by the Legal Representative, 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 Of those complaints 9 were withdrawn or discontinued, 30 were advised to be rejected based on the assessment criteria, 14 were resolved informally by way of advice and guidance, 6 complaints which had been accepted were ongoing, 5 of those complaints related to the same member and were linked with similar ongoing complaints.

There were 21 complaints in 2024. Of those complaints, 9 were rejected, 12 had been accepted. The 12 complaints that had not been rejected were currently being considered as to how they should proceed.

There had been 9 complaints so far in 2025, 2 were ongoing, 6 had been rejected and 1 complaint was accepted but had been resolved informally by advice and guidance.

Members were informed that the common prevalent theme of the complaints was inappropriate use of social media. Training was therefore identified and carried out by the Local Government Association to Members on 4 February 2025. Ten Members attended the training it was advised that the theme of complaints would be continued to be monitored to consider whether to repeat the training again.

The Standards Committee were advised that Councillors Blades and Uddin had undertaken Social Media Training on 4 February 2025 and had written a letter of apology regarding their misuse of Social Media and acknowledged that they had not met the standards of public life. The letters were received on 2 April 2025 and submitted to the Standards Committee.

Members raised issues in relation to the timelines for processing standards complaints and multiple complaints in relation to the same Members. The Legal Representative advised recruitment was underway for a full-time permanent governance solicitor who would have responsibility for standards complaints.

Members requested that they receive a monthly update as to the code of conduct position, in terms of numbers received/resolved/ongoing.

Members queried the assessment process for a complaint and the criteria used to assess a complaint. The Deputy Monitoring Officer agreed to provide a copy of the Independent

Person blank assessment form and a link to the LGA guidance.

AGREED as follows that the:

1. the information provided was received and noted.
2. monthly update as to the code of conduct position, in terms of numbers received/resolved/ongoing
3. a copy of the Independent Person blank assessment form to be circulated to Members of the Committee
4. link to the LGA guidance where the primary/secondary criteria is set out be provided to Members.

24/16

CONSTITUTION REPORT ON STANDARDS/CODE OF CONDUCT

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented a report on the update of the Constitution. The Constitution and Member Development Committee had been reviewing the provisions of the Constitution to remove duplication and improve its usability as far as possible. It was proposing to amend Section 8 of the Constitution (Standards) and sought the input of the Standards Committee as a result.

A Member provided the following comments:

- 8.2.2 states 3 parish councils, should be 2
- 8.6.1 should be standards not standard
- 8.9.1 should read; The role of elected member across all tiers of local government is a vital part of democracy
- 8.9.24 could this be changed to – remain neutral except in their role as political assistants.
- Page 53, 11 if this is members financial interest or wellbeing should the word Members be included?

AGREED as follows:

1. The comments in respect of the proposed revised Section 8 of the Constitution are submitted to the Constitution and Member Development Working Group

24/17

REVIEW OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the details of the Register for Gifts and Hospitality for Officers and Members.

The Monitoring Officer was required to review the Register of Gifts and Hospitality for Officers and Members on an annual basis and report details of the entries to the Standards Committee, to ensure that Members and Officers complied with the Members' Code of Conduct and the Officers' Code of Conduct, respectively.

The Council's Code of Conduct required Councillors and Co-opted Members to declare and register the receipt of either gifts or hospitality with a value of £25 or more.

Declarations were entered in the Register of Gifts and Hospitality. Details of entries received from Members for the period 2024-25 were attached at Appendix A. Details of entries received from Officers for the period 2024-25 were attached at Appendix B to the submitted report.

A Member queried the cost of item ref number 3/24, it was advised that the cost would have been approximately £150, and the register would be updated to reflect this.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

24/18

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

Monday 7th April, 2025