

14. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2015

REPORT OF: SOLICITOR TO THE COUNCIL AND MONITORING OFFICER
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Wards Affected: All
Key Decision: N/A
Report to: Council
23 March 2016

Purpose of Report

1. To present to the Council the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2015.

Summary

2. The report shows a decline in complaints in 2015 with issues continuing for one Parish Council.

Recommendations

3. **Members are recommended to note the contents of the 2015 Annual Report of the Standards Committee.**
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Background

4. A revised Members Code of Conduct was adopted by Mid Sussex District Council in November 2014 and a number of Parish Councils have made similar amendments in 2015. The revised Code of Conduct is similar to the one that applies to Members of West Sussex County Council.

Complaints Received

5. A number of complaints have been received about one Parish Member failing to complete their Declaration of Interest form correctly. After 4 such complaints the matter was taken to an Assessment Sub-Committee who emphasised the importance of making full interest declarations and keeping these under review and updating them where necessary.
6. Two complaints which have been otherwise resolved have involved a Member appearing to use their elected permission to further a personal interest and of a Member getting involved in a chat room discussion on social media.

Policy Context

7. Sections 26 to 37 inclusive of the Localism Act 2011 sets out the requirements for the District Council to promote high standards of elected Member conduct within its own membership and within the membership of the towns and parishes in its area. The legislation gives the Standards Committee no real sanctions to impose on the finding of a breach of the Code of Conduct. There are criminal sanctions for the failure to properly declare and act on disclosable pecuniary interests but any such action can only be brought by the director of public prosecutions. There has now been one such conviction.

Other Options Considered

8. The Council must have a Committee that deals with Standards Matters. That Committee could also carry out other functions.

Financial Implications

9. The consideration and possible investigation of complaints at both District and Town/Parish is a cost to the District Council. Training is undertaken to try to reduce the number of complaints.

Risk Management Implications

10. If there were a lot of complaints in this area there would be a pressure on the District Council budget. This risk can be reduced by dealing with issues before they become formal complaints. This has worked well so far when issues have arisen over possible interests in Neighbourhood Plan sites.

Equality and Customer Service Implications

11. We request complaints be put in writing so that it is clear what the complaint is. If a complainant has difficulty explaining their complaint in writing, officer assistance can be given.

Other Material Implications

12. The District Council follows published procedures when considering and dealing with a Member Code of Conduct complaint. It reviews these procedures on a regular basis to seek improvements. It also reviews the work of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

Background Papers

None.