

STANDARDS COMMITTEE – ANNUAL REPORT

REPORT OF: THE MONITORING OFFICER
Contact Officer: Kevin Toogood, Assistant Director, Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
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Wards Affected: All
Key Decision: No
Report to: Council
29 March 2023

Purpose of Report

1. To outline the work undertaken by the standards committee in the municipal year 2022/23.

Recommendations

2. **Council is recommended to note the contents of the report.**
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Background

3. The Standards Committee is responsible for upholding the highest standards of member conduct for both the District Council and the Town and Parish Councils in the District. It does so by conducting investigations into member conduct in circumstances where the Monitoring Officer considers, in consultation with the relevant Independent Person, that a complaint has sufficient substance to justify consideration by the committee.
4. On 26 January 2022 the council adopted the revised LGA Model Code of Conduct bringing it into effect for Mid Sussex from 1 March 2022. The revised code was produced as a response to the 2019 report of the committee on Standards in Public Life on Local Authority Ethical Standards (the "Report"). It seeks to set out in plain language how the general principles of councillor conduct (the "Nolan Principles") should be observed and contains specific obligations of conduct which all District Councillors are required to adhere to.
5. Town and Parish Councils are entitled, but not required, to adopt the model code and at present there is a mixed take-up in the Towns and Parishes of the district. Where a complaint is made against a Town or Parish Councillor, it is the code of conduct of that Town or Parish Council which must be considered.
6. At its meeting in June 2022 the committee considered the government response to the Report (which was released in March 2022, despite the Report having been produced in 2019) and there was a broad discussion on the matters raised in that response.
7. During the course of 2022/23 there were 5 complaints made. In summary, these were:
 - (a) A complaint concerning several Parish Councillors and a Community Governance Review. It was found by the Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the Independent Person) that the matters complained of could not amount to a potential breach of the Code of Conduct;

- (b) A complaint concerning a Parish Councillor's views on a planning application, which the applicant considered to be disrespectful. It was found by the Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the Independent Person) that the matters complained of could not amount to a potential breach of the Code of Conduct;
- (c) A complaint concerning a District and Parish Councillor in relation to social media posts. It was found by the Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the Independent Person) that the matters complained of could not amount to a potential breach of the Code of Conduct;
- (d) A complaint concerning an email exchange between a District and Town Councillor and a member of the public. It was found by the Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the Independent Person) that the matters complained of could not amount to a potential breach of the Code of Conduct;
- (e) A complaint concerning social media posts made by a Parish Councillor. It was found by the Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the Independent Person) that the Parish Councillor was acting in a personal capacity and therefore the Code of Conduct was not engaged.

8. Because each of these complaints was found at the initial assessment stage either not to engage the Code of Conduct or were not capable of potentially amounting to a breach, no complaints required consideration by the Assessment sub-committee.

Financial Implications

9. During 2022/23 there were few complaints, and none of the complaints received required further investigation. Consequently, there have been no unanticipated costs incurred as a result of Code of Conduct complaints.

Equality and Customer Service Implications

10. None.

Sustainability Implications

11. None

Risk Management Implications

12. None

Background Papers

- Adopted Model Code of Conduct
- Process for Dealing with Member Code of Conduct Complaints