

AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

STANDARDS REPORT 2019 - 2020

To be considered at the Audit & Standards Committee on the 21st
January 2021 and at a forthcoming Council Meeting

Foreword

I am pleased to present this report which provides a summary of Standards activities from June 2019 through to December 2020.

I would like to thank our Independent Persons, David Waxman and Jo Cairns, for their work in assisting the Monitoring Officer. I would also like to thank Sarah Cottam, Democratic Services Team Manager and Abby Brownsword, Principal Committee Secretary.

I recommend that Council receives this report on Standards Committee activities in 2019/20.

Councillor Sioned-Mair Richards
Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee
January 2021

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1. **Introduction**

- 1.1 This is the third Standards Annual Report of the merged Audit and Standards Committee and covers the period from June 2019 to January 2021.
- 1.2 Changes to the Standards regime were introduced in July 2012 by the Localism Act 2011. Although it was no longer a statutory requirement to have a Standards Committee, Full Council approved the retention of a Committee to deal with complaints and adopted a new Members' Code of Conduct and a Procedure for Dealing with Standards Complaints. The three Parish and Town Councils adopted a Joint Members Code of Conduct and a Joint Procedure for Dealing with Standards Complaints.
- 1.3 Two Independent Persons are appointed jointly, as required by the Localism act 2011 with Barnsley MBC to assist the Monitoring Officer in dealing with complaints.

2. **Standards-Specific Role of the Audit and Standards Committee**

- 2.1 The Standards responsibilities of the Committee, as set out in the Constitution, are:
- To promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors, Co-opted Members and Representatives on Committees and Sub-Committees.
 - To assist Councillors, Co-opted Members and Representatives to observe the Members' Code of Conduct.
 - To advise the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct and Protocols relating to Councillor and Officer behaviour.
 - To monitor the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct.
 - To advise, train or arrange to train Councillors, Co-opted Members and Representatives on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct.
 - To monitor, review and make recommendations to the Council with regard to the Learning and Development policy for Councillors, Co-opted members and Representatives.
 - To discharge the functions of dealing with complaints against Councillors and Co-opted Members as set out in Procedure for Dealing with Complaints Regarding City, Parish and Town Councillors and Co-opted Members.
 - To advise the Council on the adoption and revision of its Whistleblowing Policy and monitoring the operation of that Policy.

- To monitor and review procedures relating to gifts, hospitality and personal interests, for Councillors and officers.
- To monitor the Council's complaints process and the Council's response to complaints to the Ombudsman.

3. **Membership of the Committee**

- 3.1 The Audit and Standards Committee has 7 (non-executive) Members with proportionality applied and a maximum of 3 non-voting co-opted members. (Where standards related matters are to be considered by the Committee, the three Parish/Town Councils would be invited to jointly send one representative to attend the meeting for those items as an observer).
- 3.2 Meetings of the Consideration and Hearing Sub-Committees are arranged as and when required to deal with complaints referred on following assessment. The Sub-Committees are made up of 3 members of the Audit and Standards Committee, usually the Chair, Vice-Chair and another member of the Committee, a non-voting co-opted member is also required to sit on the Sub-Committee.

4. **Monitoring Officer/Support to the Committee**

- 4.1 Gillian Duckworth is the Council's Monitoring Officer and Director of Legal and Governance. The Monitoring Officer is a statutory role that:-
- Supports the Standards Committee together with the Independent Persons;
 - Contributes to the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct within the Council;
 - Maintains systems and processes for dealing with allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct for Members;
 - Investigates and reports to the Standards Committee on allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct for Members;
 - Has rights of access to any information from Members and/or officers in connection with a standards complaint;
 - Establishes and maintains registers of members' interests, gifts and hospitality;
 - Acts as a point of contact for advice and/or queries by elected members
 - Maintains and updates the Constitution;
 - Advises on various issues, poor administration and impropriety;
 - Attends all meetings of the Cabinet.
- 4.2 Further support to the Committee was provided by Paul Robinson and Abby Brownsword, Principal Committee Secretaries and Sarah Cottam, Democratic Services Team Manager who assists the Monitoring Officer with complaints concerning Councillors and provides support to Consideration/Hearing Sub-Committee's.

4.3 The Council is required by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 Act to provide the Monitoring Officer with “such staff, accommodation and other resources as are, in their opinion, sufficient to allow those duties to be performed”. The Monitoring Officer has confirmed that she has the necessary resources to meet the requirements of her role.

5. **Complaints**

5.1 The number of complaints made per year and a breakdown by the findings is set out below:-

Complaint Outcome	2019 (Jan-Dec)	2020 (Jan to Dec)
Take No Action (no breach)	14	8
Withdrawn or Invalid	1	4
Informal Resolution	5	1
Refer to Consideration Sub-Committee with an Investigation	1	0
Refer to Consideration Sub-Committee without an Investigation	1	1
Open		17
Total	22	31

5.2 In the period 2019, the Consideration Sub-Committee met twice, subsequently no cases have been referred on to a Hearing Sub-Committee. In the period 2020, to the Consideration Sub-Committee met once and did not refer the case to a Hearing Sub-Committee.

6. **Independent Persons**

6.1 The Council must appoint at least one Independent Person. Their role is advisory and they do not have a vote on any Council committee. An Independent Person can be consulted by the Monitoring Officer, the Member who is subject to a complaint and the Audit and Standards Committee.

6.2 The two Independent Persons, David Waxman and Jo Cairns, provide invaluable assistance to the Monitoring Officer in dealing with Standards complaints.

6.3 An Independent Person is involved in each complaint and consulted at various stages of the process.

7. **Parish and Town Councils**

- 7.1 The Monitoring Officer provides advice and support to the three Parish and Town Councils and these are reflected in the numbers of reported Standards complaints dealt with in 2019 and 2020.

8. **Training and Development**

- 8.1 As part of the induction for new Councillors, information was provided on the Members' Code of Conduct, the Standards regime, the Register of Interests, the key principles of good governance, the Member/Officer Relations Protocol and how the Council and decision making works. The induction also included a practical exercise, using case studies to help Members' understanding of the Members' Code of Conduct and Members' interests.
- 8.2 Further training was provided, which was open to all Members, on the role of Councillors, good governance and Standards.
- 8.3 An Ethical Standards Workshop took place for Audit and Standards Committee Members to consider how the recommendations of the Committee for Standards in Public Life report on Ethical Standards, dated January 2019, could be adopted into the Council's codes and processes.
- 8.4 In addition, specific training took place for Members of the Planning and Highways and Licensing Committees which covered the related legal framework and decision making and particular requirements relating to Member's interests and bias.

9. **Policy and Corporate issues**

The Committee has provided oversight and responded to the following policies, protocol, reports and consultations:

- 9.1
- Local Government Ethical Standards – A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life
 - Information Governance Annual Report
 - Annual Ombudsman Report

10. **Other Areas of Work**

- 10.1 The Monitoring Officer has ensured that all new Councillors had submitted their Register of Interests form relating to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Interests and that existing Councillors had reviewed and updated their interests.
- 10.2 The Monitoring Officer maintains a regular dialogue with the Council's other Statutory officers to consider and review governance arrangements. The Monitoring Officer also maintains a dialogue around governance with the Leaders and/or Whips of the political groups represented on the Council.

11. **The Year Ahead**

- 11.1 The work programme continues to ensure the Audit and Standards Committee receives updates on Standards related issues including an Annual Report throughout the year and will also include consideration of Ombudsman and Whistleblowing reviews of procedures.
- 11.2 Once the work being carried out at a national level to formulate a model code of conduct has been completed, the Committee will consider the Code of Conduct again.

12. **Recommendation**

- 12.1 (a) That Council receives and notes this report acknowledging the work of the Audit and Standards Committee in 2019 and 2020; and
- (b) agrees the actions set out in paragraph 11 for the Monitoring Officer to report back progress to a future committee.