

**Item No. 7 – Appendix**

**Procedure for Local Assessment of Complaints**

**Receiving Complaints**

1. Complaints will be in writing, addressed to the Monitoring Officer c/o The Standards Committee Sevenoaks District Council Argyle Road Sevenoaks Kent TN13 1HG. The Complaint Form set out on the Council's website can be used or otherwise the complaint can be sent by letter, e-mail or fax setting out the information referred to in the Complaint Form.
2. The Assessment Sub-Committee will deal only with complaints about the alleged behaviour and conduct of the Subject Member. It will not deal with complaints about any of the Authority's departments, services or matters not covered by the Code of Conduct.

**Anonymous Complaints**

3. An anonymous complaint will only be accepted by the Assessment Sub-Committee, providing it is accompanied by independent evidence and providing that the evidence substantiates or indicates the exceptionally serious or significant nature of the complaint.

**The Monitoring Officer's role on receipt of written complaints**

4. If the complaint is not about a Subject Member's conduct, then the Monitoring Officer will not submit the complaint to the Assessment Sub-Committee, but will decide whether the complaint is of such a nature as to be dealt with through other channels and refer the complainant accordingly.
5. The Complainant may, in the first instance, raise their concerns with the Monitoring Officer verbally. In such cases, the Monitoring Officer will ascertain whether they want to formally submit their complaint in writing to the Assessment Sub-Committee.
6. Before referring the complaint to the Assessment Sub-Committee, the Monitoring Officer will write to the Complainant acknowledging receipt of their complaint and unless the Complainant has asked for their name to be kept confidential and the Monitoring Officer being satisfied that no restrictions apply on disclosure under Section 63 of the Local Government Act 2000 and that there are no Data Protection Act 1998 implications, the Monitoring Officer will:

write to the Subject Member stating:

- that a complaint has been made against them;
- the name of the Complainant;

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- the relevant paragraphs of the Code of Conduct it is alleged they have breached;
- that the complaint will be considered by the Assessment Sub-Committee and the date of this meeting if known; and
- that a written summary of the complaint may be provided to them by the Assessment Sub-Committee.

**Presentation to the Assessment Sub-Committee Meeting**

- 7 The Monitoring Officer will present to the Assessment Sub-Committee, the Complainant's written complaint and any supporting documents comprising their complaint.
- 8 Proceedings of the Assessment Sub-Committee will take place in confidential session unless the Assessment Sub-Committee decide otherwise.
- 9 The Monitoring Officer will prepare a short summary of the key aspects of the complaint including paragraphs of the Code of Conduct the complaint might relate to, or the paragraphs the Complainant has identified.
- 10 The Monitoring Officer will supply the Assessment Sub-Committee with any other information that has been obtained by the Monitoring Officer. Such other information may comprise:
  - obtaining a copy of the Subject Member's declaration of acceptance of office and undertaking to observe the Code of Conduct;
  - minutes of meetings;
  - copy of the Subject Member's register of interests;
  - companies House or Land Registry information;
  - other easily obtainable documents.
- 11 If the Monitoring Officer is unable to understand the information submitted by the Complainant clarification of the complaint can be sought from the Complainant.
- 12 Pre-assessment enquiries will not be carried out in such a way as to amount to an investigation, that is, interviewing potential witnesses.

**Assessment Sub-Committee and Review Sub-Committee**

- 13 The composition and terms of reference of the Assessment Sub-Committee and Review Sub-Committee are set out in the Council's Constitution.

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**Closed Meetings**

14 The deliberations of the Assessment Sub-Committee and the Review Sub-Committee are not subject to the following access to information rules in respect of local government committees:

- notices of meetings;
- circulation of agendas and documents;
- public access to meetings;
- validity of the proceedings.

The sub-Committees may be supported by Officers.

15 The initial assessment of the complaint by the Assessment Sub-Committee and the review by the Review Sub-Committee of the decision of the Assessment Sub-Committee to take no action on the complaint, will be conducted in ‘closed’ session. The Complainant and the Subject Member will not be permitted to attend the deliberations of the Sub-Committees.

**Time limits for decision making**

16 As a guide the Assessment Sub-Committee meets once a month and so will endeavour to take a decision on the complaint within 20 working days of its receipt. Meeting will be held in the day time.

17 The Review Sub-Committee must conclude the review of the Assessment Sub-Committee’s decision to take no action, within three months of the receipt of the Complainant’s request for a review. However, the Sub-Committee will aim to complete the review within an average of 20 workings days from receipt of the request.

**Decision making**

18 The Assessment Sub-Committee may reach one of the following decisions:

- refer the complaint to the Monitoring Officer for investigation;
- refer the complaint to another authority’s standards committee;
- refer the complaint to the Standards Board for England;
- take no action in respect of the complaint
- refer the complaint to the Monitoring Officer for action other than investigation that is conciliation, apology, training or any other appropriate action.

19 The Review Sub-Committee has the same decisions available to it as the Assessment Sub-Committee. In addition the Review Sub-Committee may decide that the review request will not be granted.

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- 20 The purpose of the initial assessment decision or review is simply to decide whether any action should be taken on the complaint either through investigation or some other action. The Assessment Sub-Committee and Review Sub-Committee make no findings of fact. If the Assessment Sub-Committee or Review Sub-Committee refers the complaint to the Monitoring Officer for investigation or other action, it does not mean that the Sub-Committee has made up its mind about the complaint. It simply means that the Sub-Committee believes the alleged conduct, if proven, may amount to a failure by the Subject Member, to comply with the Code of Conduct and that some action needs to be taken in response to the complaint.

**Review of Assessment Sub-Committee's decision**

- 21 The Complainant has a right of review over the Assessment Sub-Committee's decision to take no action.

**Conflict of Interest**

- 22 Assessment Sub-Committee Members cannot participate in the decision making of the Review Sub-Committee but may participate in the decision making of the Determination Hearing Panel (Sub-Committee).
- 23 The Review Sub-Committee Members must be independent of the Assessment Sub-Committee's decision but may participate in the decision making of the Determination Hearing Sub-Committee.
- 24 Standards Committee and Sub-Committee Members should consider not only whether they have a personal and prejudicial interest as set out in the Authority's Code of Conduct, but also, whether their connection to, relationship with or knowledge of the Subject Member could be considered to be biased or give a reasonable member of the public the impression that the decision could be partial.
- 25 Officers should also take care to avoid any personal conflicts of interest arising when participating in the consideration of a complaint. The Monitoring Officer acts as the main adviser to the Standards Committee and its Sub-Committees, unless she has a conflict of interest in a matter that would prevent her from performing the role independently.
- 26 The Kent Monitoring Officer Protocol for Mutual Assistance provides for reciprocal Officer arrangements with neighbouring authorities, in case of conflict. This is currently being revised.

**Assessment Process**

- 27 The Assessment Sub-Committee must deal with each complaint, on a case-by-case basis on its own merits, having regard to any relevant Standard Board for

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England's guidance, advice from the Monitoring Officer and any relevant criteria and factors that the Standards Committee may determine from time to time.

- 28 Having assessed the complaint, the Assessment Sub-Committee must take one of the decisions referred to in paragraph 18 of this Procedure.
- 29 The Assessment Sub-Committee must record the main points it considered, its conclusions and the reasons for its conclusion.

**Considering whether to notify the Subject Member of the complaint – written summary**

- 30 Only the Standards Committee and its Sub-Committees have the power, under the direction of the Monitoring Officer, to provide a written summary of the complaint, to the Subject Member.
- 31 The Assessment Sub-Committee must decide on the advice of the Monitoring Officer whether a written summary of the complaint should be provided to the Subject Member. The Sub-Committee will consider the Complainant's request for confidentiality and/or whether providing a summary or any details of the complaint would be contrary to the public interest or would prejudice any person's ability to investigate the complaint or take other action.
- 32 Where the Assessment Sub-Committee decides that a written summary of the complaint can be provided to the Subject Member, this must be sent to the Subject Member with the Decision Notice and in practice the summary will normally be included in the Decision Notice.
- 33 Where the Assessment Sub-Committee has reason to believe that producing a written summary is not in the public interest or would prejudice the investigation of the complaint or the taking of other action, the written summary will not be released until the investigation or other action process begins, at which time, the written summary will be sent to the Subject Member and the Complainant and if applicable the Clerk to the Parish or Town Council.
- 34 The Sub-Committee may on applying the public interest test provide limited information on the complaint.

**Notification of the decision and its publication**

- 35 Within 5 working days of making the decision, the Assessment Sub-Committee will provide written notification of its decision and the reasons for the decision in the form of a Decision Notice together with the written summary if applicable to the Complainant, the Subject Member and if applicable the Clerk to the Parish or Town Council.

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- 36 If the Assessment Sub-Committee decides to refer the complaint to the Monitoring Officer for investigation or other action or to the Board, the Decision Notice will explain the reasons for making the particular referral.
- 37 Once the Decision Notice has been communicated to the parties in accordance with the provision of this Procedure the District Council will publish the Decision Notice, so that it is available for public inspection at the District Council's offices for a period of 6 years from the date of the Assessment Sub-Committee meeting. The written summary will not be published until it is given to the Subject Member and other parties referred to in this Procedure.

**Review Process**

- 38 The Complainant is entitled to request a review of the Assessment Sub-Committee's decision to take no action. The request for a review will be in writing, supported by reasons.
- 39 Requests for reviews will be in writing received by letter, email or fax, addressed to the Monitoring Officer c/o the Review Sub-Committee. The request for a review must be submitted by the Complainant within 30 days following their receipt of the Assessment Sub-Committee's decision.
- 40 The Complainant only has a right to review if the Assessment Sub-Committee decides not to take any action on a complaint.
- 41 A review may be more appropriate where the Complainant wishes to challenge that:
- not enough emphasis has been given by the Assessment Sub-Committee to a particular aspect of their complaint;
  - the Assessment Sub-Committee has failed to follow criteria referred to in this Procedure or any criteria published by the Board;
  - the Assessment Sub-Committee has made an error in procedure.

**Review Notification**

- 42 On behalf of the Review Sub-Committee, the Monitoring Officer will notify the Subject Member that a request for a review of the Assessment Sub-Committee's decision has been received. If applicable the Parish or Town Clerk will also be notified.
- 43 The Review Sub-Committee must deal with each request for a review, on a case by case basis, on its own merits, having regard to the relevant guidance produced by the Standards Board for England, advice from the Monitoring Officer and any relevant criteria and factors that the Standards Committee may determine from time to time.

**Agenda for the Review Sub-Committee meeting**

- 44 The Monitoring Officer will present to the Review Sub-Committee the Complainant's written request for a review and any supporting documents comprising their review request in confidence.
- 45 Having reviewed the Assessment Sub-Committee's decision to take no action, the Review Sub-Committee must take one of the decisions referred to in paragraph 18 of this Procedure.
- 46 Where the Complainant makes further or new information of any significance available in support of their complaint that changes the nature of or gives rise to a potential 'new' complaint and the information submitted is not merely a repeat complaint, the Review Sub-Committee will consider if it is more appropriate to refer the matter back to the Assessment Sub-Committee as a 'new complaint'. In the circumstances, the decision arrived at by the Review Sub-Committee will be 'that the review request not be granted'.
- 47 The Review Sub-Committee must record the main points it considered, its conclusion and the reasons for its conclusion.

**Concluding the Review**

- 48 The Review Sub-Committee must conclude the review of the Assessment Sub-Committee's decision to take no action, within three months of the receipt of the Complainant's request for a review. However, the Sub-Committee will aim to complete the review within an average of 20 working days from receipt of the request.

**Notification of the Decision and its Publication**

- 49 Where the Review Sub-Committee decides to uphold the Assessment Sub-Committee's decision to take no action, the Decision Notice will detail the decision and the reasons for the decision. The Decision Notice will be sent to the Subject Member, the Complainant and if applicable, the Clerk to the Parish or Town Council.
- 50 Where the Review Sub-Committee decides to refer the complaint to the Monitoring Officer for investigation or other action the Decision Notice will detail why the particular referral has been made and will include a summary of the complaint. The Decision Notice will be sent to the Subject Member, the Complainant and if applicable the Clerk to the Parish or Town Council.
- 51 No findings of fact are made by the Review Sub-Committee.

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- 52 At no stage in the process, will the Decision Notice and/or written summary of the complaint, be sent to other interested parties, before being sent to the Subject Member.
- 53 Where the Review Sub-Committee decides to uphold the Assessment Sub-Committee's decision to take no action the Complainant cannot pursue the matter any further with the Standards Committee.

**Criteria for Assessment**

- 54 The Criteria for Assessment is set out on the Council's website. Alternatively this can be obtained by writing to the Monitoring Officer either by letter, e-mail or fax.

**Confidentiality Requests**

- 55 The Complainant may ask for their name and details of their complaint to be kept confidential at the initial assessment stage only. Requests for confidentiality will only be granted in exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of the Assessment Sub-Committee, on the advice of the Monitoring Officer and if the Sub-Committee has reason to believe that:
- the Complainant is either vulnerable or at risk of threat, harm or reprisal;
  - the Complainant may suffer intimidation or be victimised or harassed;
  - the Complainant works closely with the person they are complaining about and they are afraid of the consequences such as fear of losing their employment;
  - the Complainant suffers from a serious health condition and there are medical risks associated with their identity being disclosed (medical evidence would need to be supplied);
  - the Complainant may receive less favourable treatment because of the seniority of the person they are complaining about;
  - early disclosure of the complaint may lead to evidence being compromised or destroyed;
  - early disclosure of the complaint may impede or prejudice the investigation;
  - early disclosure of the complaint would not be in the public interest.

Mere embarrassment is not a ground for the Complainant requesting that their name or complaint details be kept confidential.

- 56 If the Complainant's request for confidentiality is refused by the Assessment Sub-Committee, the Sub-Committee will instruct the Monitoring Officer to offer to the Complainant the option to withdraw their complaint.
- 57 In certain circumstances the public interest in proceeding with the investigation or other action outweighs the Complainant's request for confidentiality and the Assessment Sub-Committee may have no choice on the advice of the Monitoring



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Officer than to disclose the Complainant's name and complaint details, even if the Complainant has expressly asked that confidentiality be maintained.

- 58 The Assessment Sub-Committee when applying the public interest test may at its discretion, provide limited information on the complaint to the Subject Member and if applicable to the Clerk to the relevant Parish or Town Council.
- 59 In considering the public interest test, the Assessment Sub-Committee must take account of any guidance produced by the Board, any advice from the Monitoring Officer or the Ethical Standards Officer of the Standards Board for England.

**Referrals to the Monitoring Officer For Investigation**

- 60 The Assessment Sub-Committee or the Review Sub-Committee will refer the complaint to the Monitoring Officer for investigation when:
- it is serious enough, if proven, to justify the range of sanctions available to the Standards Committee or the Adjudication Panel for England;
  - the subject Member's behaviour is part of a continuing pattern of less serious misconduct that is unreasonably disrupting the business of the Authority and there is no other avenue left to deal with it, short of investigation and in considering this, the Assessment Sub-Committee or the Review Sub-Committee will take into account the time that has passed since the alleged conduct occurred.

**Referrals to the Monitoring Officer For Other Action**

- 61 The suitability of the Assessment Sub-Committee or the Review Sub-Committee referring the complaint to the Monitoring Officer 'for other action', will be dependant on the nature of the complaint and this may be the simplest and most cost effective way of resolving the issues.
- 62 'Other action' is an alternative to investigation and may be appropriate where the Subject Member has a poor understanding of the Code of Conduct and/or related Authority procedures, or where there is a breakdown in relationships.
- 63 The Assessment Sub-Committee or Review Sub-Committee must consult with the Monitoring Officer before reaching a decision to instruct the Monitoring Officer to take other action. The Monitoring Officer is required to comply with the Sub-Committees' or Ethical Standards Officer of the Standards Board for England's directions.
- 64 Complaints that have been referred to the Monitoring Officer for other action will not be referred back to the Assessment Sub-Committee or Review Sub-Committee, if the other action is perceived to have failed. The Sub-Committee's

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decision to refer the complaint to the Monitoring Officer for ‘other action’ closes the opportunity to investigate the complaint.

65 Within 5 working days of the Assessment Sub-Committee’s or Review Sub-Committee’s decision to instruct the Monitoring Officer to take other action, or the Standards Board for England’s direction to ‘take other steps’, the Monitoring Officer will inform the parties involved in writing, of the Sub-Committee’s decision or the Standards Board for England’s direction and the parties will be required to confirm in writing, that they will co-operate with the process and the Monitoring Officer will outline:

- what is being proposed;
- why it is being proposed;
- why co-operation is essential;
- what the Sub-Committee hopes to achieve;
- the time scales;

The following are some examples of alternatives to investigation:

- arranging the Subject Member to attend a training course;
- arrange for a process of conciliation;
- arranging for an apology;
- other steps to be taken as appear appropriate to the Assessment or Review Sub-Committees.

**Monitoring Officer Power to Refer Back to the Assessment Sub-Committee**

66 Where a matter has been referred to the Monitoring Officer by the Assessment Sub-Committee for action other than investigation, the Monitoring Officer may refer the matter back to the Assessment Sub-Committee if as a result of new evidence or information, the Monitoring Officer is of the opinion that:

- the matter is materially more serious or less serious than may have seemed apparent when the Assessment Sub-Committee made its decision;
- the Assessment Sub-Committee would not have decided to refer to the Monitoring Officer for action other than investigation, had it been aware of the new evidence or information; or
- the Subject Member has died, is seriously ill, or has resigned from the Authority and the Monitoring Officer is of the opinion that, in the circumstances, it is no longer appropriate to continue with the direction to take other action.

67 In forming the opinion to refer back to the Assessment Sub-Committee, the Monitoring Officer may take account of:

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- the failure of any person to co-operate with the investigation;
  - an allegation that the Subject Member has engaged in a further breach of the Code of Conduct;
  - an allegation that another Member has engaged in a related breach of the Code of Conduct.
- 68 The consideration by the Assessment Sub-Committee of a referral back by the Monitoring Officer, will be in closed session.
- 69 The Assessment Sub-Committee will consider the referral back and may take one of the decisions set out in paragraph 18 and may also direct that the matter will not be referred back a further time.

**Monitoring Officer's Report**

- 70 Within 3 months of receipt of the Assessment Sub-Committee's or Review Sub-Committee's direction to take other action or as soon as reasonably practicable, the Monitoring Officer will submit a report to the Standards Committee or a Sub-Committee of the Standards Committee including the Determination Hearing Sub-Committee detailing the other action taken to comply with the direction or what action is proposed. The access to information rules in respect of local government committees, will apply.
- 71 If the Standards Committee or a Sub-Committees of the Standards Committee including the Determination Hearing Sub-Committee is not satisfied with the action specified or proposed in the Monitoring Officer's report, it will direct the Monitoring Officer accordingly.
- 72 If the Standards Committee or a Sub-Committee of the Standards Committee including the Determination Hearing Sub-Committee is satisfied with the action taken or proposed, the Monitoring Officer will give written notice to:
- the Subject Member;
  - the Complainant;
  - the Clerk to the relevant Parish/Town Council.

**Decision to Take no Action on the Complaint**

- 73 The Assessment Sub-Committee or Review Sub-Committee may decide to take no action on the complaint and in so deciding, will have regard to the "Criteria for Local Assessment of Complaints Against Members in Respect of the Code of Conduct" set out on the District Council's website.
- 74 Where no potential breach of the Code of Conduct is disclosed by the complaint, no action can be taken by the Assessment Sub-Committee or Review Sub-

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Committee on it. Therefore, the matter of referral to the Monitoring Officer for investigation or other action, does not arise.

**Referral of the Complaint to the Standards Board for England**

- 75 In most cases, the Assessment Sub-Committee and Review Sub-Committee will be able to deal with alleged Member misconduct complaints. However, in some instances there may be public interest considerations which make it difficult for the Sub-Committees to deal with the issues fairly and speedily and as such the Sub-Committees may wish to refer the complaint to the Standards Board for England to be investigated by an Ethical Standards Officer. Examples of instances when the Sub-Committee may decide to refer the complaint to the Board are set out in the “Criteria for Local Assessment of Complaints Against Members in Respect of the Code of Conduct” set out on the District Council’s website. However, the list is not exhaustive and there may be other reasons for referral to the Standards Board for England.
- 76 The Standards Board for England may decline to investigate the complaint and may refer the complaint back to the Standards Committee.
- 77 Within 3 months of receipt of the Ethical Standards Officer’s direction to require the Monitoring Officer to ‘take other steps’, the Monitoring Officer will submit a written report to the Ethical Standards Officer, detailing the other action taken to comply with the direction or what action is proposed.
- 78 If the Ethical Standards Officer is satisfied with the action taken or proposed, the Monitoring Officer will give written notice to:
- the Subject Member;
  - the Complainant;
  - the Clerk.
- 79 If the Ethical Standards Officer is not satisfied with the action specified or proposed, the Ethical Standards Officer may require the Monitoring Officer to arrange for a statement to be published in at least one newspaper circulating in the District giving:
- details of the Ethical Standards Officer’s direction;
  - the Ethical Standards Officer’s reasons for being dissatisfied;
  - the Monitoring Officer’s response to the Ethical Standards Officer’s reasons for dissatisfaction.
- 80 In exceptional circumstances, the Standards Board England may decide to take no further action on a complaint referred to it. This is likely to be where the circumstances have changed so much, that there would be little benefit in an

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investigation or other action, or because the Standards Board for England considers that the complaint does not disclose a breach of the Code of Conduct.

- 81 There is no appeal mechanism against the Board's referral back.

**Referral of the Complaint to Another Authority's Standards Committee**

- 82 If the complaint is about a Subject Member who is no longer a District or Parish or Town Councillor or Co-opted Member, but who is a Member of another authority, the Assessment Sub-Committee or Review Sub-Committee will instruct the Monitoring Officer to refer the complaint to the Standards Committee of that other authority. The referral will be made within 5 working days of the Sub-Committee's decision.

**Withdrawing a Complaint**

- 83 Once the Complainant has lodged their complaint, they may only withdraw it with the agreement of the Assessment Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee will either grant or refuse the request against the following considerations:
- 84 Does the public interest in taking action on the complaint outweigh the Complainant's desire to withdraw the complaint?
- 85 Is the complaint such that action can be taken on it? Such as an investigation without the Complainant's participation?
- 86 Is there an identifiable reason for the Complainant requesting to withdraw their complaint? Such as is there information to suggest that the Complainant may have been pressurised by the person they are complaining of or as associate of theirs to withdraw the complaint?

**Vexatious Complaints and Complainants**

- 87 If a Complainant behaves in a way that is unreasonably persistent and or vexatious, the Monitoring Officer can apply the Council's Policy on Vexatious Complaints contained within the Council's general Complaints Process.

**Multiple Complaints About the Same Matter**

- 88 The Assessment Sub-Committee may receive a number of complaints from different complainants about the same matter. To ensure that these are dealt with in a manner that is a practical use of time and resources, the Monitoring Officer will present a report and recommendation that draws together all the relevant information and which highlights any substantively different or contradictory information. However, the Assessment Sub-Committee must still reach a

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decision on each individual complaint and follow the usual notification and publication rules set out in this Procedure.

**Mediation and Conciliation**

- 89 Mediation is a facilitative process in which disputing parties engage the assistance of an impartial third party, the mediator, who helps them to try to arrive at an agreed resolution of their dispute. The mediator has no authority to make any decisions that are binding on the parties to the dispute and has no power to impose an outcome on disputing parties. The mediator uses certain procedures, techniques and skills to help the parties to negotiate an agreed resolution of their dispute.
- 90 Contact may be made initially with each party separately or where a meeting is arranged between those in dispute to draw up a joint action plan.
- 91 The parties, rather than the mediator, decide on the terms of the settlement and it is therefore essential that all parties wish to resolve the dispute. The process is completely voluntary, so a party cannot be forced to take part in mediation and can choose to withdraw from the process at any time although the Monitoring Officer will seek the agreement of the parties that they will co-operate with the mediation process.
- 92 Conciliation is a procedure like mediation, but the third party, the conciliator takes a more interventionist role in bringing the parties together and in suggesting possible solutions to help achieve a settlement.
- 93 The difference between conciliation and mediation lies in the fact that the conciliator can make proposals for settlement while a mediator would not do so but would merely facilitate a settlement between the parties.
- 94 Any conciliation or mediation process will have an agreed timeframe for resolution. The process may be of an informal or formal nature, involving elements of training and mediation that will lead to an effective and fair conclusion of the matter.
- 95 Any decisions reached regarding future behaviour of the Subject Member and measures to prevent a repetition of the circumstances that gave rise to the initial allegation, should be agreed by all parties.

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**Equalities**

Sevenoaks District Council aims to eliminate discrimination in respect of sex, colour, race, nationality, ethnic groups, regional or national origin, age, marital status, disability, political or religious belief, sexuality or class. The Procedure is free from bias or discrimination and the aim is that those involved in the process are treated fairly and with respect.