

Item 5(i) – Monitoring Officer’s Report

Standards Committee’s Recommendation to Council

At its meeting on 24 January 2013 the Standards Committee considered the matter as follows:

The Committee considered the eighth Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer which provided an overview of the work of the Monitoring Officer, the work of the Standards Committee and general governance arrangements within the Council in the past year. The report set out the Monitoring Officer’s statutory responsibilities and summarised how the duties had been discharged during 2012.

The Monitoring Officer highlighted that there had been a number of changes over the past year and, thanks to the work of the Standards Task and Finish Group, the transition to the new standards regime had been seamless.

A Member who has also been a member of the Standards Task and Finish Group reported that the new standards regime was underpinned by the basic principle that Parliament was not interested in minor tit-for-tat complaints but was mainly interested in financial fraud. The Member also highlighted that as a result of the Localism Act 2011 there were only limited sanctions for members who were found to have breached the Code of Conduct.

Following a discussion on the sanctions that were available it was agreed that the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities would circulate the advice given by Clive Sheldon QC regarding sanctions.

Another Member questioned whether there was anything more that the District Council could do to encourage Parish and Town Councils to adopt one single Code of Conduct across the District. The Committee asked the Monitoring Officer to write to the Clerks and Chairmen of Parish and Town Council asking what Code of Conduct their Councils had adopted.

In response to a question regarding the nature of complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman the Monitoring Officer circulated the letter from the Local Government Ombudsman outlining the types of complaint that had been received. The Monitoring Officer also reported that the Customer Services Manager could circulate some further information to Members of the Committee as long as there was no breach of data protection. The Chairman stressed that it was important for the Standards Committee and the Performance and Governance Committee to receive detailed information of the complaints that were investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman.

A Member also highlighted that the list of meetings on page 21 of the report reflected only the statutory meetings held by the Council. In addition to the 82 meetings listed, there were also working group meetings, briefing meetings and the Standards Task and Finish Group meetings which were all serviced by Officers. The Member stressed the need for Councillors to bear in mind the costs involved in requests that were made to officers and ensure that member governance structures were cost effective and sustainable.

The Committee thanked the Monitoring Officer for the concise and comprehensive report and the work that she had undertaken over the previous year.

Resolved: that

(a) The Monitoring Officer's Annual Report be endorsed; and

(b) Full Council be recommended to endorse the Monitoring Officer's Annual Report.

Text in bold relates to the Standards Committee recommendation to the Council.

