

Item 7(b) - Monitoring Officer's Annual Report

The attached report was considered by the Standards Committee on 12 February 2019, and the relevant minute extract is below:

Standards Committee (12 February 2019, Minute 3)

Members considered the fourteenth annual report of the Monitoring Officer, which included a breakdown of the complaints he had received from January to December 2018.

The Monitoring Officer advised that there had been ten complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman during the year. Four related to Planning and Development, two to Environmental Services, two to Benefits and Tax and one each to Housing and Highways/Transport. He advised that five had been referred back for local resolution and two were closed after initial enquiries. He also advised that he as Monitoring Officer had received nine complaints against District, Town and Parish Councillors, six of which failed the initial intake test. Of the remaining three complaints, one was withdrawn and two were assessed as cases for no further action.

Members queried the term of office for an Independent Person and how difficult was it to recruit to such a role.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the Independent Person was appointed for an indefinite amount of time and that although some authorities found it hard to fill a vacancy, the Council had not experienced significant difficulties.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the Committee on Standards in Public Life had recommended that legislation be amended to provide for the appointment of Independent Persons for a maximum of two years, renewable once.

A Member also queried if, going forward, the Monitoring Officer's report could be made gender neutral. The Monitoring Officer agreed this would happen from the next annual report.

A Member indicated she wished to consider the recent report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life and indicated her view that the Committee should look at implementing some recommendations. In particular, she indicated that she felt Local Government Association corporate peer reviews should also include mandatory consideration of a local authority's processes for maintaining ethical standards. The Monitoring Officer advised Members that this could not yet be lawfully imposed. As some Members had not seen the recommendations, the Monitoring Officer advised he would send these out after the meeting.

Action 1 - Monitoring Officer to provide Members of the Committee with the list of recommendations from the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

Members also discussed whether another meeting could be arranged in June or July 2019. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that this could be arranged, but was dependent on whether there was any business and whether the Chairman of the Committee required the extra meeting to be added.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That the report be noted and it be recommended to Council that the report be noted.