



Worcester
CITY COUNCIL

WORCESTER CITY COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

2021/22

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1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Under the Localism Act 2011, local authorities are responsible for their own standards arrangements, including promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct and having mechanisms in place to investigate complaints and make decisions on them.

2. The Standards Committee

- 2.1 The role and function of the Committee are set out in the Council's Constitution, as follows:

- (a) promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors, Co-opted Members and Parish Councillors.
- (b) Advising the City Council and its Parish Councils on the adoption and amendment of local Codes of Conduct for Councillors, protocols for member officer relations, whistleblowing policies and complaints procedures collectively known as Local Codes.
- (c) Monitoring the operation of the Local Codes adopted by the City Council and its Parish Councils.
- (d) Advising and training or arranging for the training of City Councillors, Parish Councillors, Co-opted Members and Officers on matters relating to the Local Codes.
- (e) Granting dispensations in respect of Members' Interests in accordance with regulations made by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.
- (f) Considering allegations of breaches of the Local Codes by members of the City Council or its Parishes and considering what sanctions, if any, to impose where allegations are found proven.
- (g) Considering reports from the Monitoring Officer.
- (h) Considering any reports issued by the Local Government Ombudsman regarding the City Council, authorising any payments proposed by the Local Government Ombudsman and recommending any other action that may be appropriate.
- (i) Considering any reports issued by the Local Government Ombudsman regarding either of the City's Parish Councils and recommending any appropriate action to them.
- (j) Approving payments or the provision of other benefits to a person (or persons) where the Committee considers that maladministration has occurred on the part of the City Council and that the person or persons has or have been adversely affected by it.
- (k) Considering and taking any appropriate action in respect of any alleged breaches of the Council's Local Codes.

3. Membership and Meetings

- 3.1 For the 2021/22 Municipal Year, the Standards Committee membership was as follows:

City Councillors

Chair: Councillor Andy Roberts

Vice-Chair: Councillor Matt Lamb

Councillors Alan Amos, Karen Lawrance, Steve Mackay, Chris Mitchell, Louis Stephen

Co-opted Independent Member

Mr Raymond Needham JP

Parish Council Representatives

Councillors Alan Tidy and Roger Knight - St. Peter the Great Parish Council

Councillors Dave Carney and Mrs Dawn Merriman - Warndon Parish Council

- 3.2 The Committee met twice, in June and November. Meetings are streamed lived on the Council's website. The recordings are subsequently published on YouTube.

4. Monitoring Officer

- 4.1 The Monitoring Officer is Sian Stroud. Claire Chaplin, Democratic and Civic Services Manager and Georgina Coley, Legal Team Manager, carry out jointly the role of Deputy Monitoring Officer.

- 4.2 The Monitoring Officer provides advice and guidance to City Council Members and Parish Councils on a range of issues and works closely with fellow Monitoring Officers from other Worcestershire Councils.

5. Consideration of Complaints Regarding Conduct of Councillors

- 5.1 Complaints made under the Members' Code of Conduct are made to the Monitoring Officer. An online complaint form is available on the Council website.

- 5.2 The Complaints Procedure was adopted by the Council in March 2014 and provides that a complaint will initially be considered by the Monitoring Officer and an Independent Person, once the Monitoring Officer is in receipt of all relevant information to enable an initial assessment of the complaint to take place. After consulting the Independent Person, the Monitoring Officer will decide either to take no action on the allegation, to resolve the complaint informally or to arrange an investigation.

- 5.3 During the Municipal Year 2021/22, the Monitoring Officer considered a total of 7 complaints. Before making a decision in relation to each complaint, the Monitoring Officer consulted with one of the Independent Persons from the pool appointed to consider complaints. As at the end of the Municipal Year, the summary of the outcomes was as follows:

- No action (*Complaint fell outside the scope of the Code OR No breach of the Code*) – 5
- Informal resolution – 1
- Assessment not yet complete – 0
- Referred to Hearings Sub-Committee – 1 (see below)

The Hearings Sub-Committee meeting took place in private on 8 March 2022. The Sub-Committee considered a complaint made against a Councillor in respect of an alleged breach of the Code of Conduct for Members. The case was investigated by an

Independent Investigator and the Sub-Committee were presented with a comprehensive report. Having considered all the circumstances, the Sub-Committee decided that no breach of the Code had occurred and no further action should be taken.

6. Ombudsman Complaints

- 6.1 The Committee considers any formal reports that are issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman following investigation of a complaint, where resolution is not agreed, or there is an issue of public interest.
- 6.2 In addition, the Monitoring Officer has a duty to report when there has been an investigation which identifies maladministration in the exercise of administrative functions, or a failure in a service or a failure to provide a service.
- 6.3 During the year, there were no reports from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) for the Committee to consider.

7. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review Letter

- 7.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) publishes an Annual Review Letter every year. The most recent one, for the year ending 31st March 2021 was presented to the Committee in November 2021.
- 7.2 The Letter highlighted that the overall number of complaints and enquiries received by the Ombudsman about Worcester City Council decreased dramatically from 17 in 2019/20 to 5 in 2020/21. However, the Ombudsman did not receive any new casework between March and June 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 7.3 The number of cases where an investigation was carried out by the Ombudsman decreased from 5 in 2019/20 to 2 in 2020/21. However, of these investigations carried out 100%, were upheld. Both cases related to planning matters.

8. Members' and Officers' Interests and Gifts and Hospitality

- 8.1 The Council holds registers of Members' disclosable pecuniary interests, and declarations of gifts and hospitality received by Members and Officers. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, the Committee was unable to review these registers, however the declarations are also published on the Council's website. During the year, all Members checked their declaration of disclosable pecuniary interests (DPIs) under the Localism Act 2011. These were updated online where appropriate.

9. Code of Conduct for Members

- 9.1 A revised Code of Conduct was adopted by the Council in July 2020. This pan-Worcestershire Code was prepared by the Monitoring Officers of the principal authorities within Worcestershire in response to Best Practice Recommendations published in January 2019.
- 9.2 The Local Government Association's revised Model Code of Conduct was published in January 2021. The Model Code was substantially unchanged from the version which was subject to consultation, except to note that the LGA has moved away from its original idea of introducing "civility" alongside "respect".

9.3 The Worcestershire Monitoring Officers agreed to adopt the new Code, although a revised version has not yet been through the committees of all the Worcestershire councils. The Code adopted by the Council in 2020 remains in force until such time as a new pan-Worcestershire Code has been adopted.

10. Training on Ethical Standards

10.1 Following the May 2022 elections, the Monitoring Officer undertook a training session with the Council's newly-elected Members on the Code of Conduct and ethical standards.

11. Conclusion

11.1 This Committee will continue to produce an Annual Report, highlighting the work that it has undertaken, and this is referred to the full Council for information.

11.2 I succeeded Councillor Andy Roberts as Chair of the Committee in May 2022 and am therefore new to this role. I would like to thank Councillor Roberts for his diligence and commitment to ensuring that a high standard of conduct is maintained within the Council and I am pleased that he will be my Vice-Chair for 2022-23.

11.3 I would also like to thank fellow Committee Members, co-opted Members and Officers for their contribution during the past year.

Councillor Mel Allcott
Chair, Standards Committee
July 2022