



Worcester
CITY COUNCIL

WORCESTER CITY COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

2016/17

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1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Under the Localism Act 2011 new standards arrangements came into effect on 1 July 2012. Local authorities are now 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.
- 1.2 The terms of reference of the Standards Committee are:
- (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 Persons 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.

2. Membership and Meetings

- 2.1 For the 2016/17 Municipal Year, the Standards Committee membership was as follows:

City Councillors

Chairman: Councillor Jo Hodges

Vice-Chairman: Councillor Mrs. Lucy Hodgson

Councillors Paul Denham, Matthew Lamb, Steve Mackay, James Stanley

Co-opted Independent Members

Mr. Raymond Needham JP

Mrs Christine Davenport MBE (Resigned July 2016)

Parish Council Representatives

Mrs Pam Clayton and Mr. Paul Thorlby - St. Peter the Great Parish Council

Mrs. Valarie Barrall and Mrs Dawn Merriman - Warndon Parish Council

During the year, Mrs Christine Davenport MBE tendered her resignation. The Chairman expressed her sadness at the decision and Committee Members thanked Mrs Davenport for her valuable work over the years, many of which had been spent as Chairman.

- 2.2 The Committee met 3 times in 2016/17, in July, November and March. Meetings took place at the Guildhall and were open to all Members of the Council and the public.

3. Monitoring Officer

- 3.1 The Committee is supported by Tim O’Gara, Deputy Director - Governance, who is also the Council’s Monitoring Officer. Claire Chaplin, Democratic and Civic Services Manager and Georgina Coley, Legal Team Manager, carry out jointly the role of Deputy Monitoring Officer.

4. Consideration of Complaints as to Conduct of Councillors

- 4.1 Complaints made under the Members’ Code of Conduct are made to the Monitoring Officer.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 During the year, the Committee were advised of 3 complaints received. Before making a decision on each case, the Monitoring Officer consulted one of the Independent Persons from the pool appointed to consider complaints. The Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person found as follows:

- Complaint 1 – no action taken
- Complaint 2 – no action taken
- Complaint 3 – complaint resolved informally.

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

5.1 The Committee reviews these registers at each meeting. All Members are required to complete a declaration of disclosable pecuniary interests – DPIs - under the Localism Act 2011. These are reviewed by each Member annually and updated as appropriate. Where Members have updated their declarations, they have completed a fresh form. The information declared is published on the Council's website.

6. Ombudsman Complaints

6.1 The Committee receives reports on formal reports that are issued by the Local Government 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 For the year commencing 1st April 2016, there were no reports or upheld decisions received or incidents of maladministration identified by the Ombudsman to report to the Committee.

7. Guidance on the Use of Electronic and Social Media

7.1 The Committee considered and approved guidance on the use of social media in meetings by Members. The purpose of the guidance is to highlight the relevant provisions in the Council's Constitution and to provide some practical guidance on the use of social media and other electronic devices.

7.2 The Committee has also adopted guidance for Members on the use of social media, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Blogger, Wordpress, Snapchat and YouTube. Aspects of the Members' Code of Conduct apply to Members' online activity in the same way as to other written or verbal communication. Councillors should comply with the general principles of the Code in what they publish and what they allow others to publish.

8. Training for Members on Standards Issues

8.1 In November 2016, training was provided for all Members, including Parish Council representatives, on the Code of Conduct and local codes and protocols. Aspects covered included: Current Framework, Role of Monitoring Officer, Role of Standards Committee, Code of Conduct and General Obligations, Codes and Protocols for Planning and Licensing, Registering Interests (DPIs) and Disclosing Interests at Meetings, Complaints about Member Conduct, Member/Officer Relations, Hospitality and Gifts. Members also had the opportunity to discuss a variety of scenarios, which generated some lively feedback.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 The City Council adopted a new Code of Conduct for Members at the Full Council meeting on 26th June 2012. The Council promotes a high standard of Conduct and the Standards Committee will continue to monitor the operation of the local Code.
- 9.2 The Council commenced a new Committee system of governance in May 2017, under which there are two types of committees: 'Policy' Committees and 'Regulatory' Committees. Three 'Policy' committees - Policy and Resources, Communities and Environment – have replaced the former executive arrangements. The Council's four 'Regulatory' committees - Licensing and Environmental Health, Planning, Audit and Governance and Standards – have not changed. This Committee will continue to produce an Annual Report, highlighting the work that it has undertaken over the last twelve months, which will be referred to the full Council for information.

Councillor Jo Hodges
Chairman of the Standards Committee
July 2017