

Report to	-	Audit and Standards Committee
Date	-	10 December 2018
Report of the	-	Monitoring Officer
Subject	-	Code of Conduct Complaints Monitoring and other Standards Related Matters

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

Monitoring Officer: Lisa Cooper

Introduction

1. This routine report sets out brief details of the complaints received since the last meeting; as agreed by the Committee, this report will present cases on a six monthly rolling basis. It also advises Members of other standards matters that have been dealt with since the Committee's last meeting.

Complaints Received

2. There have been no valid Code of Conduct complaints against any Parish, Town or District Councillor received since the last meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee.

Other Standards' Matters

3. As Members may be aware, within this Committee's functions and delegations is a duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members of the Council. The following paragraphs set out the standards related matters that have been undertaken since the Committee's last meeting.
4. In the July edition of the Members' Bulletin an article was included on the outcome of the Committee on Standards in Public Life's review into the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates in July 2017. The report made a total of 33 recommendations, five of which apply to elected Members and holders of office in public life, as follows:
 - Nobody in public life should engage in intimidatory behaviour, nor condone or tolerate it. All those in public life have a responsibility to challenge and report it wherever it occurs.
 - Those in public life should seek to uphold high standards of conduct, adhering to the Seven Principles of Public Life, and help prevent a decline in public trust in political institutions through their own conduct.
 - Those in public life must set and protect a tone in public discourse which is not dehumanising or derogatory, and which recognises the rights of others to participate in public life.
 - Those in public life have a responsibility not to use language which engenders hatred or hostility towards individuals because of their personal characteristics.

- Those in public life should not engage in highly personalised attacks, nor portray policy disagreements or questions of professional competence as breaches of ethical standards.
- 5. One recommendation related to local authority Monitoring Officers and Members were reminded of the sensitive interests' provisions in the Localism Act 2011 within the same bulletin article. These provisions prevent the publication of the details of an interest, where it is agreed that it could lead to intimidation or violence against a Councillor or their family – which can include their home address. Whilst currently all Councillors' home addresses are publicly available, this information can be withheld from the public domain in these circumstances and this provision will be advised to all elected Members following the elections in May 2019.
- 6. As Members may be aware, the Seven Principles of Public Life and the above five recommendations apply to ALL holders of public office, and this includes paid employees (officers) of the Council. Following liaison with Human Resources, it is confirmed these will form part of all future officer contracts of employment.
- 7. In August Members were reminded of the provisions of the Code of Conduct that within 28 days of becoming aware of any new personal interest or disclosable pecuniary interest, Members must register details of that new personal interest or change by providing written notification to the Council's Monitoring Officer. To facilitate this an audit was undertaken of the Members' Register of Interests, inviting all Members to review their current register entry and notify any amendments that were required. The majority of Members responded (95%) and the audit resulted in 11 separate individual amendments being made, all minor in nature and not relating to any disclosable pecuniary interest.
- 8. Proactive advice concerning disclosable pecuniary interests was also sent to all Members ahead of the extra-ordinary meeting of full Council held on 15 October, to consider the Development and Site Allocations draft consultation document. This provided Members with an opportunity to give advanced consideration to their land interests and whether or not they would need to declare an interest at the meeting.

Conclusion

- 9. It is pleasing that there have been no Code of Conduct complaints to consider since the last meeting. Steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members have been taken through other initiatives as outlined in this report.

Mrs Lisa Cooper
Monitoring Officer

Risk Assessment Statement

The Audit and Standards Committee has a duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and co-opted Members of the Council. Monitoring the number of complaints received and the nature of the complaints will enable the Committee to identify any trends and make recommendations for additional training and guidance as appropriate. Failure to do so could result in continued poor Member conduct, an increase in complaints administration and reputational damage for the Council.