



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Standards Committee Report July 2012 to June 2014

Introduction by the Chairman of the Committee – Rob Stanton

1.0 What does the Standards Committee Do?

The broad role of the Standards Committee is to promote, monitor and enforce probity and ethical standards amongst Councillors within the Wokingham Borough area including Town and Parish Councillors.

In July 2012 the Localism Act introduced a locally focussed and designed system for the adoption of a Councillor Code of Conduct, and processes for the receipt, and consideration of complaints against Councillors. Although not obligated by the Localism Act, Wokingham Borough Council decided to maintain a dedicated Standards Committee. The revised structures and processes have now had time to bed down and are considered to be operating effectively and independently.

As well as the receipt and consideration of Code of Conduct complaints against Wokingham Borough Council Councillors, the Committee is also responsible for the receipt and consideration of complaints against Town and Parish Councillors.

The Terms of Reference for the Committee as set out within Chapter 9 of the Constitution are set out below:

Role and Function

The Standards Committee will have the following roles and functions:

- a) promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors, co-opted members, including church and parent governor representatives;
- b) assisting the Councillors, co-opted members, including church and parent governor representatives, to observe the Members' Code of Conduct;
- c) advising the Council on the adoption or revision of its Members' Code of Conduct;
- d) monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct, the Officers' Code of Conduct and the Council's Whistleblowing policy and any other appropriate codes of conduct and procedures;
- e) advising, training or arranging to train Councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct;
- f) the exercise of (a) to (e) above in relation to the parish/town councils wholly or mainly in its area and the members of those parish/town councils;
- g) the presentation of an annual report by the Chairman of the Standards Committee to Council.

2.0 Who sits on the Committee?

The Committee is comprised of six Wokingham Borough Council Councillors. These Councillors are voting members of the Committee and are appointed on the basis of political proportionality. A councillor from Wokingham Borough Council chairs the Committee.

The Committee is also comprised of three non –voting Town/Parish Councillor representatives.

The 2014/2015 membership of the Committee is as follows:

Rob Stanton, (Chairman)
Pauline Helliard-Symons (Vice-Chairman)
Chris Bowring
Ken Miall
Malcolm Richards
Beth Rowland

Ray Duncan (Woodley Town Council)
Roger Loader (Barkham Parish Council)
Roy Mantel (Twyford Parish Council)

3.0 Independent Persons

Under the Localism Act, Wokingham Borough Council is required to appoint an independent person, (a member of the public, not a Council Officer or Councillor) whose views must be sought before the Committee takes a decision on an allegation it has decided to investigate and whose views may be sought on an allegation prior to that. In addition, a Councillor who is subject of an allegation may seek the views of the independent person.

Two people have been appointed as independent persons:

David Comben
John Bingham

An independent person cannot sit as a Member of the Standards Committee, but may attend with the same rights as a member of the public.

4.0 Who supports the Committee

The Committee is supported by Andrew Moulton, Monitoring Officer of Wokingham Borough Council and Head of Governance and Improvement Services, Mary Severing, Deputy Monitoring Officer. Administrative support is provided by Kevin Jacob, Principal Democratic Services Officer.

5.0 Complaint Statistics July 2012 to June 2014

The revised arrangements for the Code of Conduct were introduced in July 2012. In this period 12 complaints were made regarding Councillors within the Wokingham Borough Council area. Of these 6 related to Borough Councillors and 6 related to town/parish councillors.

The Committee would stress that the number of complaints should be seen in the context of there being 54 members of the Borough Council and over 200 hundred members of town/parish councils across 17 parishes. The above statistics, also cover a two year period. As such the number of complaints received represents a very low percentage of the number of members. However, the Committee recognises the utmost importance of treating any allegation seriously.

6.0 Committee Activity

Since its establishment the full Committee has focussed on the successful implementation of the new Code of Conduct and process for the administration of

complaints and has made a number of improvement and clarifications to the complaints handling process and the Code of Conduct itself.

The Committee has also monitored the outcome of complaints considered by the Monitoring Officer as part of the complaints process.

7.0 **The Future**

The Committee continues to look for ways to further improve the processes around the consideration of complaints and to expand its activity around the promotion of high standards of ethical behaviour.