



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Standards Committee

Annual Report

2017/18

Submitted to the Council – March 2018



Introduction by UllaKarin Clark, Chairman of the Standards Committee

I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for 2017/18.

The key aim of the Standards Committee is the promotion and maintenance of the highest standards of conduct by elected Members representing the Borough, Town and Parish Councils. Members' conduct should be underpinned by the seven principles of public life, also known as the Nolan principles. These are selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

The Standards Committee met three times during the year and focussed on ensuring that the Borough Council's policies, as set out in the Members' Code of Conduct, were up to date and underpinned by best practice. The Committee considered trends arising out of complaints data and arrangements to ensure that Members were aware of their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct. The Committee is especially keen to ensure that newly elected Members are aware of their responsibilities and the standards of behaviour expected of them.

In relation to the points above, I am pleased to report that the level of Code of Conduct complaint activity in 2017/18 was significantly lower than in previous years.

I would like to record my thanks to the Borough, Town and Parish Members, Officers and Independent Persons who contributed to the work of the Committee. In particular, I would like to mention the contribution of Roger Loader (Parish Council representative) and Carole Freeman (Independent Person) who stood down during the year. I wish them well for the future.

Finally, I would like to welcome Paddy Haycocks and Nick Oxborough to their roles as Independent Persons.

**UllaKarin Clark
March 2018**

1.0 What does the Standards Committee Do?

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

The Localism Act 2011 removed the requirement for a national code of conduct and statutory Standards Committees. The Act introduced a locally focussed “light touch” framework for the adoption of a Member Code of Conduct, and processes for the receipt and consideration of complaints. Although not obliged to do so under the terms of the Localism Act, Wokingham Borough Council decided to maintain a dedicated Standards Committee.

In addition to the receipt and consideration of Code of Conduct complaints against Wokingham Borough Council Members, the Committee is also responsible for the receipt and consideration of complaints against Town and Parish Councillors. If the complaints process determines that a Town/Parish Councillor is in breach of the Code of Conduct, recommendations will be submitted to the relevant Town/Parish Council as to the appropriate sanction. However it is for the Town/Parish Council to decide what action is to be taken.

The Terms of Reference for the Committee, recorded in Chapter 9 of the Borough Council’s Constitution, are set out below:

Role and Functions

The Standards Committee has the following role 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 Standards Committee?

The Committee is made up of six Wokingham Borough Council Members. These Members are voting members of the Committee and are appointed on the basis of political proportionality. An elected Member from Wokingham Borough Council chairs the Committee. The current Chairman is Councillor UllaKarin Clark.

The Committee also includes three, non-voting, Town and Parish Council representatives.

The 2017/2018 membership of the Committee was:

- UllaKarin Clark, (Chairman)
- Ken Miall (Vice-Chairman)
- Chris Bowring
- Prue Bray
- Pauline Helliard-Symons
- Paul Swaddle

- Sally Gurney (Wokingham Town Council)
- Roy Mantel (Twyford Parish Council).
- Roger Loader (Barkham Parish Council) – part year.

3.0 Independent Persons

Under the terms of the Localism Act 2011, Wokingham Borough Council is required to appoint an Independent Person (a member of the public, not a Council Officer or elected Member) whose views must be sought before the Standards Committee takes a decision on an allegation it has decided to investigate. The Independent Person's views may also be sought on an allegation prior to that stage. In addition, a Member who is subject of an allegation may seek the views of an Independent Person. Three people are currently acting in the Independent Person role:

- David Comben
- Paddy Haycocks
- Nick Oxborough

An Independent Person cannot sit as a member of the Standards Committee, but may attend meetings with the same rights as a member of the public.

4.0 Who Supports the Standards Committee?

The Committee is supported by:

- Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer
- Mary Severin, Borough Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer
- Neil Carr, Democratic Services.

5.0 **Standards Committee Activity in 2017/18**

During the 2017/18 Municipal Year three Code of Conduct complaints were received. The Standards Committee considered an update report on the complaints and investigations at each of its meetings. The complaints related to:

- The conduct of a Borough Councillor at a meeting with external partners.
- The process a Parish Council followed in nominating persons as trustees to a local charity.
- A post on social media made by a Town Councillor.

No action was taking in relation to any of these complaints as it was concluded, in each case, that there had been no breach of the Code of Conduct.

It is worth reiterating that the number of complaints received should be seen in the context of there being 54 Borough Council Members and over 200 Members of Town and Parish Councils across the Borough.

Whilst recognising that the level of complaint activity in 2017/18 was very low, the Committee continues to recognise the importance of dealing with every complaint seriously and expeditiously.

6.0 **Standards Committee – Future Actions**

The Committee will continue to seek improvements to the Code of Conduct and supporting processes to ensure continuous improvement in line with best practice. In so doing it will seek to maintain the credibility and good governance of the Borough, Town and Parish Councils.

The Committee will also deliver further training and support, as necessary, to underpin high standards of ethical behaviour by elected Members and Officers across the Borough. High standards of behaviour help to build trust in elected representatives which is crucial to the democratic process.

The Committee has also submitted comments to the Review of Ethical Standards in Local Government undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The review is examining the structures, processes and practices relating to codes of conduct, investigation of breaches of said codes, sanctions for misconduct, managing conflicts of interest and whistleblowing.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life aims to report on these issues later in 2018. Any learning points from that report will be incorporated into local policies and procedures to ensure that the highest standards of conduct are maintained.

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