

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REVIEW

MAY 2013 TO MARCH 2014

THE STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Membership of the Standards Advisory Committee is as follows:

Elected Members

Councillor Jagit Grewal (Chair)
Councillor Arvind Dhaliwal
Councillor Mewa Mann (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Fiza Matloob
Councillor Harjinder Minhas
Councillor Wayne Strutton

Co-Opted Independent Members

Ronald Roberts
Alan Sunderland

Parish Council Members

Charles Burke / Scott Bryant (Colnbrook with Poyle Parish Council)
Janice Finn (Britwell Parish Council)
Harjinder Singh Gahir (Wexham Court Parish Council)

Independent Person (Observer only)

Fred Ashmore

Note

Parish Councillors Charles Burke and Janice Finn were newly appointed to the Committee by their respective Parish Councils in May/June 2013. In March 2014 Colnbrook with Poyle Parish Council appointed Scott Bryant in place of Charles Burke.

The Committee met two occasions during the year, on 3rd October 2013 and 18th March 2014. It is pleasing to note that matters around Member Conduct were sufficiently light to enable two Committee meetings during the year to be cancelled owing to insufficient business. Committee agenda papers, reports and minutes are available on the Council's website at www.slough.gov.uk

Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director Professional Services, is the Council's Monitoring Officer, with whom the Committee has joint responsibility to produce this Annual Review.

Introduction by the Chair

2013/14 has been a time for consolidation of the arrangements introduced in the Localism Act 2011 for the regulation of standards of conduct for elected and co-opted members of the Borough Council and Parish Councils. This has allowed a period for Members familiarise themselves with their responsibilities under the new arrangements and in particular the new statutory duty for Members to register their 'Disclosable Pecuniary Interests'. These declarations, together with those arising from the locally imposed duty to notify the Monitoring Officer of other pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests, form the public Register of Members' Interests, available for viewing on the Council's website.

The Standards Advisory Committee has an important role in overseeing the investigation and determination of any complaints against Members where a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct has been alleged. I wish to thank the Members and Co-opted Members of the Committee, and the Independent Person, for their assistance over the year and hope that we may continue to work together to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by all Members.

Councillor Jagit Grewal

Roles and Functions of the Committee

The Committee's main roles and functions revolve around:

- Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct and assisting Members to observe these as set out in the Council's Ethical Framework and the Code of Conduct.
- Advising and training Members in all matters relating to the Ethical Framework, monitoring the operation of it and Members' performance against it.
- Keeping under review the Code of Conduct and the Whistle-Blowing policy and making recommendations to the Council when revisions are considered to be ready.
- The determination of any written complaints against a Member and the taking of any appropriate action.

Activity and Action in 2013/14

The Localism Act 2011 placed a duty on the Council to adopt a Code of Conduct which must be, when viewed as a whole, consistent with the following principles:

- (a) selflessness;
- (b) integrity;
- (c) objectivity;
- (d) accountability;
- (e) openness;
- (f) honesty;
- (g) leadership.

These principles, known as the Seven Principles of Public Life, were developed by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (originally known as the Nolan Committee), an independent public body which advises government on ethical standards across the whole of public life. The Borough Council in common with most local authorities and other public bodies incorporated the Seven Principles into its Code of Conduct adopted in June 2012, together with the description of each Principle. In its 14th report the Committee on Standards in Public Life set out revised descriptions to a number of the Seven Principles, which generally strengthened the wording and in some cases widened their scope. The Council adopted the revised wording of the Seven Principles for the Code of Conduct on 16th May 2013, on the recommendation of the Standards Advisory Committee.

A further development in the body of advice available to Members came in the shape of the issue by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) of a revision to its guide for Councillors entitled "Openness and Transparency on Personal Interests". The Guide contained background information on why the Government had brought in the new standards arrangements, and gave useful advice about personal interests, Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, and how a Member affected should act. Two additions to the guide concerned the requirement for a Member to make a specific disclosure of trade union membership. The Committee took the view that the amended guidance raised no issue that was not already covered by the Council's existing arrangements. The Guide was made available to Members and a general reminder was issued through the Members' Bulletin drawing attention to it requesting Members to ensure that their notifications for the register of interests are accurate and up to date.

Committee Membership 2013/14

As noted above, Britwell and Colnbrook with Poyle Parish Councils appointed new representatives to sit on the Committee.

Although not formally a member of the Committee, the Council's Independent Person, Mr Fred Ashmore, was due to stand down during the year as his appointment under the transitional arrangements of the Localism Act became time expired. Steps were taken to advertise for persons interested in taking

up the position of Independent Person, who was expected to work closely with the Monitoring Officer, and be consulted at various stages of the Standards process. The aim was to complete the recruitment process in time for the appointment of the recommended candidate to be confirmed at the Annual Meeting in May 2014.

A vacancy also exists for a third co-opted Independent Member to be appointed and it was the intention to consider this further in the light of interest received in the Independent Person position.

Complaints Activity

It is satisfactory to note that there has been a relatively low level of complaints activity during the year.

There were five complaints pending at the end of the last year which were awaiting initial assessment by the Monitoring Officer. Three of the complaints were in relation to issues involving both Parish and Borough Councillors (where the Borough Councillors were twin-hatted) and the other two related to Borough Councillors. A summary of the complaints and the outcome (in each case reached after consultation with the Independent Person) is:

Complaint about	No.	Outcome
Interests [Section 3 of Code] Queries about decision of Parish Council	2	Minutes record that interests were declared. No breach of Code. Queries about decision referred to Parish Clerk.
Verbal abuse by Councillor – treating others with respect [2.1 of Code]	1	Considered complaint was motivated by malice, tit-for-tat or politically motivated. No further action.
Behaviour not open, honest or genuine at a public meeting – maintaining high standards of conduct [2.4 of Code]	1	Reminder about good conduct sent to subject councillor and Group Leader. Complainant declined to provide further evidence of breach of code.
Alleged behaviour in relation to Union colleague in breach of the Principles of Public Life and the Code of Conduct [1.4 to 1.6 of the Code]	1	Allegation did not relate to activity in the role of Councillor. No further action.

There were seven complaints received in the year, five of which related to Parish Councillors and two related to a Borough Councillor. A summary of the complaints and the outcome (in each case reached after consultation with the Independent Person) is:

Complaint about	No.	Outcome
Failure to treat others with respect [2.1 of Code]	1	Reminder about good conduct sent to subject councillor. No further action.
Bullying/harassment - failure to treat others with respect [2.1 of Code]	1	Considered not appropriate since complaint submitted by a third party.
Non disclosure of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest [3.4 of Code]	1	Referred for investigation. Considered by Standards (Determination) Sub-Committee – found that the Code had been breached although Member had rectified the notification of his DPI.
Bullying; rude and abusive behaviour; failure to treat others with respect [2.1 of Code]	1	Reminder letter to Parish Councillor drawing attention to those parts of the Code which his behaviour placed him in breach of.
Procedural matters relating to the running of Parish Council meetings	1	Not considered to fall within the Code. Response sent to complainant with comments from the Parish Clerk.
Non Disclosure of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest [3.4 of Code]	1	Referred for investigation.
Offensive email; bringing the office into disrepute [2.3 of the Code].	1	Referred for investigation.

Future Training

In order to promote and maintain high standards of conduct, there is an ongoing need to provide training and guidance for Members, to refresh and renew understanding of and compliance with best practice on standards issues and good governance. There is also a need to bear in mind new Members coming into office through normal electoral turnover. With whole Borough elections programmed for May 2014 it is proposed to build relevant standards training into the induction programme for the new Council.

Further Information

For further information on Standards matters generally or advice in relation to the Code of Conduct, please contact either:

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