

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REVIEW

JUNE 2014 TO MARCH 2015

THE STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Membership of the Standards Advisory Committee is as follows:

Elected Members

Councillor Mike Hollege (Chair)
Councillor Arvind Dhaliwal
Councillor Antreev Dhillon
Councillor Fiza Matloob
Councillor Rajinder Sandhu
Councillor Khaula Usmani

Co-Opted Independent Members

Graham Davies
Ronald Roberts
Alan Sunderland

Parish Council Members

Scott Bryant (Colnbrook with Poyle Parish Council)
Harjinder Singh Gahir (Wexham Court Parish Council)
Orlando Isernia (Britwell Parish Council)

Independent Person (Observer only)

Dr Louis Lee

Note

Parish Councillor Orlando Isernia was newly appointed to the Committee by Britwell Parish Council in June 2014.

Graham Davies, Co-Opted Independent Member and Dr Louis Lee, Independent Person, were appointed to the Committee in September 2014.

The Committee met on two occasions during the year, on 18th June 2014 and 17th March 2015. 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

2014/15 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.

Given that the role of the Committee has reduced under the arrangements of the Localism Act 2011 and the reduced level of activity relating to Member complaints, it is proposed that the Committee merge with the Audit and Risk Committee. The future work of the Standards Advisory Committee will be combined with that of the Audit and Risk Committee under the new Audit and Corporate Governance Committee. I hope that we may continue to work together to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by all Members.

Councillor Michael Holledge

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 2014/15

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.

Committee Membership 2014/15

As noted above, Britwell Parish Councils appointed a new representative to sit on 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 and Dr Louis Lee was appointed to this role. Given the level of interest received for this post, the Council was in a position to also appoint to the vacant co-opted Independent Member position on the Committee and Graham Davies was appointed to this role.

Complaints Activity

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

The Committee noted that for the period June 2014 to date, one complaint had been received relating to a Borough Councillor, a summary of which is detailed in the table below.

Complaint about	No.	Outcome
Bringing the office into disrepute [2.3 of the Code] and avoid conflict between personal interest and the public interest [2.7 of the Code]	1	Referred for investigation.

Future Role of the Committee

It is noticeable that the role of the Committee has reduced under the new arrangements particularly as the Monitoring Officer now had delegated authority to seek to resolve a complaint informally where a formal investigation is not merited.

A number of drivers were behind the proposal to merge the Standards Advisory Committee with the Council's Audit and Risk Committee.

Reduced complaint activity and complaints that give rise to a need to involve the Standards Advisory Committee in considering ethical issues, has meant that there is a risk that the ethical agenda is not as visible as it once was. Some Council's have added ethical standards to the terms of reference of their Audit Committee to ensure that the ethical agenda remains visible in the Council and to achieve a more joined up governance role for the Audit Committee. There is no reason to believe that complaints alleging breaches of the code of conduct are likely to increase in the future.

Similarities and synergies – both Committees deal with governance, probity and transparency of processes.

Transparency International UK Report on Corruption in Local Government. This Organisation has issued a report with the key recommendation to Government being that the changes taking place in local government should be reviewed, to ensure that they do not inadvertently create an enabling environment for corruption. Specific recommendations include introducing a statutory requirement for local authorities to have an audit committee, strengthened whistle blowing systems, enhancing audit procedures, extending the Nolan Principles and for local authorities to carry out a periodic corruption risk assessment in relation to their own functions and operations. The Standards Advisory Committee was made aware of this report at its meeting on 18th March 2014 and it was agreed that a further report be made to a possible joint meeting of the Standards Advisory and

Audit and Risk Committees as both Committees had responsibilities for governance and probity matters.

Recruitment and Retention of co-opted members – there is currently one co-opted independent person on the Audit and Risk Committee and three independent co-opted people on the Standards Advisory Committee. Combining the roles of the two committees would both enable the Council to benefit from skills and input of independent people across a broader area of responsibility and provide a more stimulating role for independent people which, in turn, will assist in retention.

Role of the new Committee

The newly merged Audit and Corporate Governance Committee would have the objective of making a positive contribution to the Council's governance and control environment. The Committee will also have an important role in ensuring public money is spent wisely and providing assurance to the public that the council is complying with the law, has an effective control framework in place and provides quality services in line with corporate priorities.

As the Council has a role in the standards and conduct issues of Parish Councillors it is proposed that one Member from each of the three Parish Councils in the Borough be invited to attend and speak at the Committee if it is considering a report relating to material changes to the Code of Conduct for Members.

Whilst recognising the benefits of merging the two Committees there is no wish to put additional pressure on the Committee's work on risk management framework and its scrutiny of the authority's financial and non financial performance and it is therefore proposed that a Standards Determination Sub Committee be established to determine allegations of breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct, on a reference from the Monitoring Officer and to undertake any detailed work necessary on the Code of Conduct, making recommendations to the Committee as necessary.

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 training needs for new Members coming into office through normal electoral turnover and the co-opted Independent Members. Following a merger of the Committee's it is essential that relevant training is provided to both elected members and co-optees to ensure that they are aware of their role and responsibilities as members of the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.

Further Information

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

Kevin Gordon, Monitoring Officer	Catherine Meek, Head of Democratic Services
01753 875213	01753 875011
kevin.gordon@slough.gov.uk	catherine.meek@slough.gov.uk