

Body: **AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

Date: **11 March 2015**

Subject: **Members and Standards: an update**

Report Of: **LAWYER TO THE COUNCIL AND MONITORING OFFICER**

Ward(s) All

Purpose To assist the Audit and Governance Committee in fulfilling its obligations in relation to member standards.

Recommendations: That the Committee note the following:

- The information supplied to it regarding complaints against members, dispensations issued to members and also member training on Standards
- The update provided on Standards-related matters

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1.0 Background

1.1 Members will recall their longstanding invitation to the Monitoring Officer to provide quarterly updates on Standards-related matters. This report aims to provide such an update to this Committee in order to assist it in discharging its role in leading and overseeing standards of conduct at this authority.

2.0 Complaints

2.1 No new formal complaints against members have been received in during this quarter. As none remain outstanding from previous quarters, no complaints await determination at time of writing.

3.1 Dispensations

3.2 No new dispensations have been applied for since the last quarterly report.

4.0 Member training

4.1 As members are aware, the Committee's remit includes responsibility to review member training and development across all areas.

4.2 Plans are currently being formulated for induction sessions for any new members who are elected in May 2015, as well as for the new programme of member training during the next financial year. In deciding on the training offer to be provided both in-person and online, consideration will be given to whether some of the generic member training led by Legal Services might be delivered jointly with Lewes District Council following the legal services merger, if appropriate and in accordance with members' requirements.

5.0 Update on Standards related matters

- 5.1 At this authority, there has been no increase in standards-related issues in recent months. However not all authorities have been experiencing calm in the run up to May 2015. One (Hartlepool BC) has seen sufficiently large numbers of complaints to lead its Chief Executive to state publicly that the volume of tit for tat complaints is diverting resources and time which would be better spent elsewhere. Another (Bradford BC) has seen fit to amend its Code to enable the Chairman of the standards committee together with the City Solicitor to decide to take no further action about complaints against councillors deemed to be "malicious/vexatious, politically motivated, tit for tat or not sufficiently serious to warrant further action".
- 5.2 The only other matter to report is the fact that one of the three independent persons appointed under the Localism Act 2011 – Mr Tony Meier – has indicated a desire to resign. That leaves two independent persons in post: Allen Gale and Trevor Elliott. The intention is to submit their names to annual Council in May 2015 for re-appointment.

6.0 Consultation

- 6.1 There has been no consultation.

7.0 Resource Implications

- 7.1 None.

8.0 Financial

- 8.1 None.

9.0 Staffing

- 9.1 None.

10.0 Conclusion

- 10.1 Authorities must have in place arrangements to monitor member conduct and to promote effective decision-making. It also a requirement that steps be taken to promote high standards of conduct. This report aims to assist this Committee in discharging its responsibilities in this regard.

Victoria Simpson
LAWYER TO THE COUNCIL AND MONITORING OFFICER

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

Previous reports and minutes of this Committee.

The Constitution of Eastbourne Borough Council

Articles in the Local Government Lawyer

The 2013/14 annual report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, published in September 2014:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/358202/Annual_Report_241014_CSPL_Final__V2_.pdf

CSPL Report on Ethical standards for providers of public services:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ethical-standards-for-providers-of-public-services>

News bulletins from the local press, collated by the Standards Exchange:

http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/11471689.Change_in_policy_agreed_f_or_complaints_about_councillors/

<http://www.hartlepoolmail.co.uk/news/local/burden-of-bickering-politicians-petty-spats-put-council-staff-under-strain-1-7034075>