

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT

Meeting	9 March 2021
Report Author	Chair of the Standards Committee
Status	For Information
Classification:	Unrestricted

Executive Summary:

The Chairman's annual report summarises and comments on the work of the Standards Committee for the period March 2020 - March 2021.

Recommendation(s):

Members note the report.

Corporate Implications

Financial and Value for Money

None arising from this report.

Legal

The role of the Standards Committee is to promote high standards of conduct by councillors and co-opted members in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct. This report relates to the Committee's function to monitor the effectiveness of the Code of Conduct.

Corporate

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Equality Act 2010 & Public Sector Equality Duty

Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to the aims of the Duty at the time the decision is taken. The aims of the Duty are: (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, and

(iii) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Protected characteristics: age, sex, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief and pregnancy & maternity. Only aim (i) of the Duty applies to Marriage & civil partnership.

This report relates to the following aim of the equality duty: -

- To eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- To advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- To foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

This report relates to the following corporate priorities: -

- Communities

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This is my first annual report as Chair of the Standards Committee. I have been involved in Standards for a number of years as a substitute independent person and as such attended numerous council meetings over the years.

1.2 When I agreed to take on the role I was a bit sceptical about what my full role would entail. Little did I know that my first year would be virtual meetings, but we managed.

1.3 One face-to-face training session was also held for the Independent Members of the Committee.

2.0 Constitutional Review Working Party (CRWP) and Standards Committee Meetings

2.1 CRWP met on 5 November 2020 and 23 February 2021. These meetings were looking into improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the petition scheme and questions to Full Council, as well as updating the Constitution.

2.2 The review of questions to Full Council was put to the Standards Committee on 18 November 2020 and re-considered by CRWP on 23 February 2021 in light of further suggestions from councillors.

2.3 Some scheduled Standards Committees were cancelled (28 May and 8 Sept 2020) due to paucity of business.

3.0 Complaints about Member Behaviour Considered by a Standards Sub Committee of Thanet District Council 2020/21

- 3.1 The totality of complaints received relating to both District and Town/Parish Councils between March 2020 and March 2021 was 12.
- 3.2 Of the 12 complaints received in this period, 5 were judged not to meet the jurisdiction test. 7 cases were therefore progressed for consideration by a sub-committee.
- 3.3 Of those 7 assessed by sub-committees, 6 were deemed not worthy of further action. Reasons included: being corporate complaints not concerning councillors; the subject not acting in their capacity as a Member at the time; insufficient evidence; and the complaint having already been referred to the police.
- 3.4 The one remaining complaint against a Parish councillor was upheld and an informal resolution process was instigated.
- 3.5 An investigation from the previous year was also carried over and in light of that investigation it was concluded that no further action should be taken.
- 3.6 It is pleasing to see that Council Meetings are running a lot more smoothly than they have in the past and the Council has made a great deal of progress on this.
- 3.7 I would like to issue just one word of caution and that concerns social media. I would ask that members who use social media both as a Councillor and member of the public be aware that the large majority of the public assume you are speaking as a Councillor, when sometimes this is not the case. I refer you to complaint TDCSC 242/20 in the Standard Statistics table, attached as an annex to this report.
- 3.8 If re-appointed I am happy to continue my role as Chair of the Standards Committee.

4.0 Thanks

- 4.1. I would like to thank Democratic Services especially Mr Hughes and Miss Brewer for the help and support they have afforded me in the last year. It certainly made my role easier. I would also like to thank the Council Members of the Committee for the support they have given me. One must also not forget the work of the late Councillor Campbell who was an extremely active member and keeping me on my toes. He will be missed. Finally I want to thank the Independent Members of the Committee for their commitment to the Committee and also the Council Independent Person for his work over the year.

Annex List

- 1 - Standards Statistics.

Background Papers

None.

Corporate Consultation

Finance: *N/A*

Legal: Estelle Culligan, Director of Law & Democracy and Deputy Monitoring Officer.