

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT

Meeting	Standards Committee
Date	10 March 2022
Report Author	Chair of the Standard's Committee
Status	For Information
Classification:	Unrestricted

Executive Summary:

The Chair's annual report summarises and comments on the work of the Standards Committee for the period March 2021 - March 2022.

Recommendation(s):

That members note the report and refer the report to Council.

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 2nd Annual Report as Chair of the Standards Committee.
- 1.2 With the easing of COVID restrictions we have managed to hold face to face meetings of the committee.
- 1.3 It is pleasing to say that none of the complaints made required formal investigation therefore saving the Council unnecessary expenditure.
- 1.4 Hopefully part of this year's training will incorporate myself and a member of Democratic Services attending local Parish and Town Council meetings to explain the functions of the Standards Committee.

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

- 2.1 CRWP met on 15 June 2021, 11 November 2021 and 23 February 2022. We discussed the following: Members Parental leave Policy, Planning protocol changes, amendments to mandatory training for councillors, social media guidance, members' questions at Council meetings, declaration of member vacancies and questions in response to the Leader's report at Council meetings.
- 2.2 The Standards Committee meeting scheduled for 14 September 2021 was cancelled due to lack of business.

3.0 Complaints about Member Behaviour Considered by a Standards Sub Committee of Thanet District Council 2021/22

- 3.1 The Council received 21 complaints raised under the Members' Code of Conduct between March 2021 and March 2022.
- 3.2 Of the 21 complaints received in this period, two were considered to be corporate complaints not concerning councillors and were therefore referred to the corporate complaints system. Nine were considered not to meet the jurisdiction test. Two complaints are not yet concluded. Eight cases were therefore progressed for consideration by a sub-committee.
- 3.3 Of those assessed by sub-committees, 1 complaint was withdrawn and 1 resulted in a decision of no further action due to the complaint being unfounded.
- 3.4 Of the remaining 6 complaints, all were considered to be suitable for the informal resolution process. The sub-committee made various recommendations back to the complainants and subject members. No complaints were referred for further investigation.
- 3.5 The sub-committee dealt with a number of complaints from both councillors and members of the public about allegations relating to disclosures of interests, particularly relating to posts on social media sites.
- 3.6 As a result, the sub-committee recommended that further training on declarations of interests and how this relates to social media was requested. The Constitution was also updated with the LGA guidance on social media. Training will be delivered later in the year.
- 3.7 The Standards Committee is in the process of recruiting two new Independent Members.

4.0 Thanks

- 4.1. I would like to thank the Independent Members of the Standards Committee for their dedication, particularly Mr Lee Wellbrook who recently resigned from the post - we wish him well.

Annex List

Standards Complaints Table 2021-22

Background Papers

None

Corporate Consultation

Finance: N/A

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