

**ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE
2016/2017**

**Councillor Mordue
Chairman of the Standards Committee**

1. Purpose

- 1.1. To present the Annual Report on the work of the Standards Committee during 2016/2017.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Council is invited to note the report attached as an Appendix.

3 Supporting Information

- 3.1 Although there is no legislative requirement for the Standards Committee to produce an Annual Report, doing so is recognised as good practice and the Committee has decided that this continue. The publication of the report promotes transparency and high ethical standards, keeps the wider Council membership informed of issues addressed by the Committee and emphasises the importance attached by the Committee, and therefore the Council, to the maintenance of high standards of Governance.
- 3.2 Following submission of the Report to Council, a copy will be posted on the Council's website.

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Background documents: None

**AYLESBURY VALE DISTRICT COUNCIL STANDARDS COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT 2016/2017**

1. Generally

- 1.1 The current standards regime was introduced by the Localism Act, 2011, and this Council's Code of Conduct was adopted in July, 2012.
- 1.2 Under the current regime, Parish/Town Councils have the option of either adopting their own Code of Conduct, based on the model developed by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), or adopting AVDC's Code. Some have adopted this Council's Code.
- 1.3 The Council is no longer statutorily required to have a Standards Committee, but it decided that it should continue to do so in the interests of promoting transparency and high ethical standards in local governance.
- 1.4 The Standards Committee comprises 7 elected Members and is politically balanced according to the political parties represented on the Council. There are two Parish representatives nominated by the Aylesbury Vale Association of Local Councils (AVALC) to ensure that the interests of Parish/Town Councils are properly taken into account in the decision making process.
- 1.5 The Localism Act requires the appointment of at least one Independent Person, but AVDC was in the fortunate position to have three high calibre candidates and it was decided to appoint all three. One of the Independent Persons subsequently resigned as he moved away from The District. The Monitoring Officer was satisfied that this would not have any significant effect on the work of the Committee and the Chairman of the Standards Committee concurred with this view. The remaining Independent Persons' terms of office came to an end earlier this year and following consultation with the Chairman of the Standards Committee and Other Committee Members, it was agreed that the two remaining post holders should be invited to serve for a further term. It was felt that this would ensure consistency of approach to the decision making process, enable the Council to take advantage of the expertise already built up and save the need to proceed with what would otherwise be an expensive recruitment exercise. This course was confirmed at the Council meeting on 22 February.
- 1.6 The Parish representatives and the Independent Persons are invited to attend every meeting of the Standards Committee in an advisory capacity and have no voting rights.

2. Standards Activity

- 2.1 Since May, 2016, the Monitoring Officer has received 9 complaints. Three of these related to District Councillors and the remainder related to Parish Councillors.
- 2.2 One of the complaints against a District Councillor did not proceed as it came outside the Standards regime. One complaint proceeded to a Stage 1 Hearing, where it was decided that the complaint was unfounded. The remaining complaint is awaiting the completion of formal details from the complainant and this may well not proceed.

2.3 With regard to the complaints against Parish Councillors, the position is as follows:-

- Two were the subject of Stage 2 assessments which determined that no further action was necessary.
- One did not proceed beyond Stage 1 as the complainant provided no supporting information.
- One was the subject of a formal investigation by an independent investigator. (Although the complaint was received in 2015, it was the subject of a Hearings Sub-Committee held earlier this year). The Parish Councillor concerned was found to have breached the Parish Council's Code of Conduct, which had involved a formal report to the Parish Council. The individual had also been invited to offer an apology to the complainant.
- Two are likely to proceed to Stage 2.

2.4 By way of reminder, Stage 1 is where the complaint is resolved locally without the need for any formal hearings. Stage 2 involves the Monitoring Officer, after consultation with either the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Standards Committee and a duly appointed Independent Person, determining whether or not a complaint might involve a breach considered to be serious enough to require further formal investigation. Stage 3 involves a formal investigation by an independent investigator and a Hearings Sub-Committee meeting to determine what action should be taken in the light of the investigator's report.

2.5 Standards decisions are publicly accessible on the Council's web site and can be viewed using the following link:-

<http://democracy.aylesburyvaldc.gov.uk/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=13294>

3. Standards Committee Meetings

3.1 The Committee has not needed to meet formally during the course of the year, (other than for the Annual Meeting) which is a reflection of the fact that there are no significant ethical issues within the Vale. However there has, as mentioned previously, been the need to convene two second stage hearings to deal with two complaints and one Hearings Sub-Committee to consider an independent investigator's report. This is perhaps a useful reminder of the importance of the need to consider carefully the requirements of the Code of Conduct.

4. Conclusions

4.1 On the whole elected representatives within the Vale take the need to maintain high ethical standards seriously. However, equally it will be appreciated that, if substantiated, any breach of a Council's Code of Conduct is also a serious matter. The Standards Committee will continue to take all opportunities that present themselves to promote high ethical standards and open and accountable governance.

Councillor Howard Mordue
(Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Compliance and Chairman of the Standards Committee)