

ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE 2018/19
Councillor Mordue
Chairman of the Standards Committee

1. Purpose

- 1.1. To present the Annual Report on the work of the Standards Committee during 2018/2019.

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. The publication of the report promotes transparency and high ethical standards and keeps the wider Council membership informed of issues addressed during the course of the year.
- 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 2018/2019**

1. Background

- 1.1 The current standards regime was introduced by the Localism Act, 2011, and the existing Code of Conduct was adopted in July, 2012. (Further information on this is contained later in this report)
- 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 and others the NALC Code. In January, 2019, the results of a review of local government ethical standards carried out by The Committee on Standards in Public Life were published. This Council contributed to the consultation exercise. One of the many recommendations made is that section 27(3) of the Localism Act should be amended to state that Parish Councils must adopt the Code of their principal authority. This and the other recommendations made by the Committee require legislative changes and there is no indication at this stage as to when those changes will (if at all) be made.
- 1.3 The Council is not statutorily required to have a Standards Committee, but it decided after the Localism Act came into force 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 when dealing with complaints against Town/Parish Councillors.
- 1.5 The Localism Act requires the appointment of at least one Independent Person, but AVDC has two in order to cover any contingencies. At the moment there is no limit on the time that Independent Persons can serve. However, one of the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life is that the term of office of Independent Persons should be fixed for two years, renewable only once. Again this is reliant on a legislative change, the date for which is unknown.
- 1.6 The Parish representatives and the Independent Persons are invited to attend every meeting of the Standards Committee in an advisory capacity. This too could be changed in due course following the Committee on Standards in Public Life's recommendation that these individuals should become full voting Members of the Standards Committee.
- 1.7 This report relates to the period May, 2018 to April 2019.

2. Standards Activity

2.1 Since May, 2018, (in fact from August 2018 to date), there have been 11 complaints against Parish Councillors and one complaint against a District Councillor. Very brief details are given below:-

- Wing – 2 complaints (non declaration of interest). Both withdrawn
- Drayton Parslow – 2 complaints (one about alleged disrespect, the other about damaging the reputation of the Council). Both went to stage two where it was decided that no further action was necessary.
- Steeple Claydon – one complaint (non declaration of interest). Went to stage two where it was decided no further action was necessary.
- Stowe – 4 complaints (various but mainly disrespect). Went to stage two where it was decided that no further action was necessary.
- Nash – one complaint (acting in own interests). Awaiting determination.
- Stowe – one complaint (breach of legislation). Awaiting determination.
- District Councillor – (failure to respond to residents). Went to stage two, where it was decided that no further action was necessary.

2.2 By way of reminder stage one involves trying to seek a local resolution, stage two involves a review hearing by the Chairman of the Standards Committee and an Independent Person.

2.3 Members will recall that last year, as part of the consideration given to the independent auditor's report on the activities of AVB, and for the purposes of clarity and ease of understanding, the existing Code of Conduct should be reviewed. The review was carried out by the Lead Legal and Monitoring Officer in conjunction with the Chairmen of the Audit and the Standards Committees, together with one back bench Member who had expressed a specific interest to become involved.

2.4 The review was comprehensive, and Members may recall the Chairman of the Audit Committee mentioning at the last Council meeting that this review had been completed but that the Committee on Standards in Public Life had, in addition to making a number of recommendations to Government, had also listed what it felt was best practice. He mentioned that the Lead Legal and Monitoring Officer was looking at the revised Code to ensure that it picked up the best practice advice. That work had been completed and elsewhere on this agenda is a revised Code of Conduct for Council approval. Of course, the new unitary authority will in due course need to consider its own Code.

3. Conclusions

3.1 I hope that Members will agree that the level of governance work undertaken this year demonstrates the Council's determination to maintain high ethical standards.

Councillor Howard Mordue
(Chairman of the Standards Committee)