

A meeting of the **REFERRALS (ASSESSMENT) SUB COMMITTEE** will be held in **MEETING ROOM CVSO.1B, CIVIC SUITE, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST. MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, CAMBS, PE29 3TN** on **WEDNESDAY, 31 MARCH 2010** at **10AM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

APOLOGIES

1. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 2)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd March 2010.

2. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

To receive from Members declarations as to personal and/or prejudicial interests and the nature of those interests in relation to any Agenda Item. Please See Notes 1 and 2 below.

3. GUIDANCE TO ASSIST ASSESSMENT OF CASES (Pages 3 - 6)

- ◆ Local Assessment Case Handling Chart; and
- ◆ Guidance received from "Standards for England" on the conduct of an assessment.

4. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

To resolve

that the public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information under paragraph 7(c) relating to the deliberations of a Sub-Committee of the Standards Committee established under the provisions of Part 3 of the Local Government Act 2000.

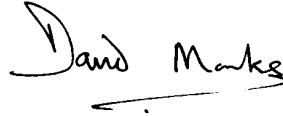
5. PRE-ASSESSMENT REPORT AND ENQUIRIES - CASE NO. 28 (Pages 7 - 38)

Enclosed, pre-assessment report by the Monitoring Officer to which is attached various other correspondence/information to assist Members in assessing the case.

6. PRE ASSESSMENT REPORT AND ENQUIRIES CASE NO 29 (Pages 39 - 74)

Enclosed, pre-assessment report by the Monitoring Officer to which is attached various other correspondence/information to assist Members in assessing the case.

Dated this 4 day of October 2011



Chief Executive

Notes

1. *A personal interest exists where a decision on a matter would affect to a greater extent than other people in the District –*
 - (a) *the well-being, financial position, employment or business of the Councillor, their family or any person with whom they had a close association;*
 - (b) *a body employing those persons, any firm in which they are a partner and any company of which they are directors;*
 - (c) *any corporate body in which those persons have a beneficial interest in a class of securities exceeding the nominal value of £25,000; or*
 - (d) *the Councillor's registerable financial and other interests.*
2. *A personal interest becomes a prejudicial interest where a member of the public (who has knowledge of the circumstances) would reasonably regard the Member's personal interest as being so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Councillor's judgement of the public interest.*

Please contact Ms C Deller, Democratic Services Manager, Tel No 01480 388007/e-mail: Christine.Deller@huntsdc.gov.uk if you have a general query on any Agenda Item, wish to tender your apologies for absence from the meeting, or would like information on any decision taken by the Sub-Committee.

Specific enquiries with regard to items on the Agenda should be directed towards the Contact Officer.

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting as observers except during consideration of confidential or exempt items of business.

Agenda and enclosures can be viewed on the District Council's website – www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk (under *Councils and Democracy*).

If you would like a translation of Agenda/Minutes/Reports or would like a large text version or an audio version please contact the Democratic Services Manager and we will try to accommodate your needs.

Emergency Procedure

In the event of the fire alarm being sounded and on the instruction of the Meeting Administrator, all attendees are requested to vacate the building via the closest emergency exit.

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HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the REFERRALS (ASSESSMENT) SUB COMMITTEE held in Meeting Room 2.1, Pathfinder House, St. Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 2 March 2010.

PRESENT: Mr M Lynch – Chairman.
Councillor Mrs B E Boddington and
Mr J Alexander.

121. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Committee held on 2nd February 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

122. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

123. GUIDANCE TO ASSIST ASSESSMENT OF CASE

The guidance produced by Standards for England and collated by the Monitoring Officer to assist the Sub-Committee in their assessment of the case submitted was received and noted.

124. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information under paragraph 7 (c) relating to the deliberations of a sub-committee of the Standards Committee established under the provisions of Part 3 of the Local Government Act 2000.

125. PRE-ASSESSMENT REPORT AND ENQUIRIES - CASE NO. 27

The Sub-Committee considered the following documents collated by the Monitoring Officer (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book) to assist their deliberations in respect of a complaint received against a Councillor serving on St. Neots Town Council -

- (a) original e-mail containing complaint received from Councillor G S E Thorpe;
- (b) copy of minutes of St. Neots Town Council's Audit Committee held on 20th January, 2010;
- (c) case review advice on Paragraph 3 of the Code of Conduct published by Standards for England; and
- (d) registration of interests form - Councillor B S Chapman.

126. INITIAL ASSESSMENT - CASE NO. 27

Members considered the allegation made in the case of Councillor B S Chapman of St. Neots Town Council seeking the advice of the Monitoring Officer as necessary. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that no further action be taken in respect of the allegation made against Councillor B S Chapman for the reasons set out in the "Decision Notice - No Further Action" appended to these Minutes as no potential breach of the Code of Conduct was disclosed by the complaint.

Chairman

DECISION NOTICE: NO FURTHER ACTION

Reference: Case No. 27

The Referrals (Assessment) Sub-Committee appointed by Huntingdonshire District Council resolved to exclude the public from the Sub-Committee's proceedings under paragraph 7(c) of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and paragraph 8(b) of the Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008. In these circumstances, parties associated with the complaint are requested to exercise caution when discussing or passing on information that is in the notice or about the notice.

Complaint

On 2nd March 2010, the Referrals (Assessment) Sub-Committee of this authority comprising Messrs. M Lynch (Chairman) and J Alexander and Councillor Mrs B E Boddington considered a complaint from Councillor G S E Thorpe concerning the conduct of Councillor B S Chapman, a Member of St Neots Town Council. We have set out a general summary of the complaint below:

the complaint alleged that Councillor B S Chapman had breached paragraph 3(1) of the District Council's Code of Conduct which states that –

“you must treat others with respect”.

The complainant alleged that Councillor Chapman had failed to treat the Responsible Finance Officer and Acting Town Clerk, Officers of St Neots Town Council with respect when he had accused them, at a meeting of the Audit Committee on 20th January 2010, of “adding fat to the budget and padding it”. Councillor Thorpe considered that this action had been compounded by the fact that the statement had been made at a meeting when members of the public had been present.

Decision

In accordance with Section 57A(2) of the Local Government Act 2000, as amended, the Referrals (Assessment) Sub-Committee of the Standards Committee decided that no further action should be taken in respect of the allegation as no potential breach of the Code of Conduct was disclosed by the complaint.

Reasons for Decision

In reaching their conclusion, the Sub-Committee considered that Councillor Chapman, as a Councillor and in particular, as Chairman of the Audit Committee had a right to challenge the information presented by Officers and to establish the facts underlying the business being considered by the Audit Committee. The Sub-Committee did not consider that Councillor Chapman's action or opinion represented personal anger at or abuse of the Responsible Officer or the Acting Town Clerk and noted that it was the view of ‘Standards for England’ that councillors should be entitled to an extremely high degree of protection, in terms of freedom of expression given the importance of political expression to the maintenance of a democratic society and that the threshold for a failure to treat another with respect has to be set at a level that allows for the passion and frustration that often accompanies political debate and the discussion of the efficient running of Council.

However, the Sub-Committee were of the view that Officers and Members should seek to establish a good working relationship for the benefit of the community they serve and as such it might have been good practice for Councillor Chapman to give the Town Council Officers advance notice (if he had not already done so) of the questions/issues he was going to raise at the Audit Committee meeting.

This Decision Notice is sent to the person making the allegation.

Right of Review

At the written request of the complainant, the authority can review and change a decision not to refer an allegation for investigation or other action. A different sub-committee to that involved in the original decision will undertake the review.

We must receive the complainant's written request within 30 days from the date of this notice, explaining in detail on what grounds the decision should be reviewed.

If we receive a request for a review, we will deal with it within a maximum of three months of receipt.

Terms of Reference

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 amends the Local Government Act 2000, which now provides for the local assessment of new complaints that Members of relevant authorities may have breached the Code of Conduct. The Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008 relate to the conduct of local authority Members and the requirements for dealing with this.

The Regulations set out the framework for the operation of a locally based system for the assessment, referral and investigation of complaints of misconduct by Members of authorities. They amend and re-enact existing provisions in both the Relevant Authorities (Standards Committees) Regulations 2001, as amended, and the Local Authorities (Code of Conduct) (Local Determination) Regulations 2003, as amended.

Signed: *M. Lynch* **Date:** *5/3/10*

Mr M Lynch
Chairman of Sub-Committee

GUIDANCE TO ASSIST ASSESSMENT OF CASE

EARLY GUIDANCE RECEIVED FROM THE STANDARDS BOARD ON THE CONDUCT OF AN ASSESSMENT

Which complaints will we refer for investigation?

We decide that a matter should be investigated when we believe that it meets one of the following criteria:-

- It is serious enough, if proven, to justify the range of sanctions available to the Adjudication Panel for England or local Standards Committees;
- It is part of a continuing pattern of less serious misconduct that is unreasonably disrupting the business of the authority and there is no other avenue left to deal with it, short of investigation;
- In considering this, we will take into account the time that has passed since the alleged conduct has occurred.

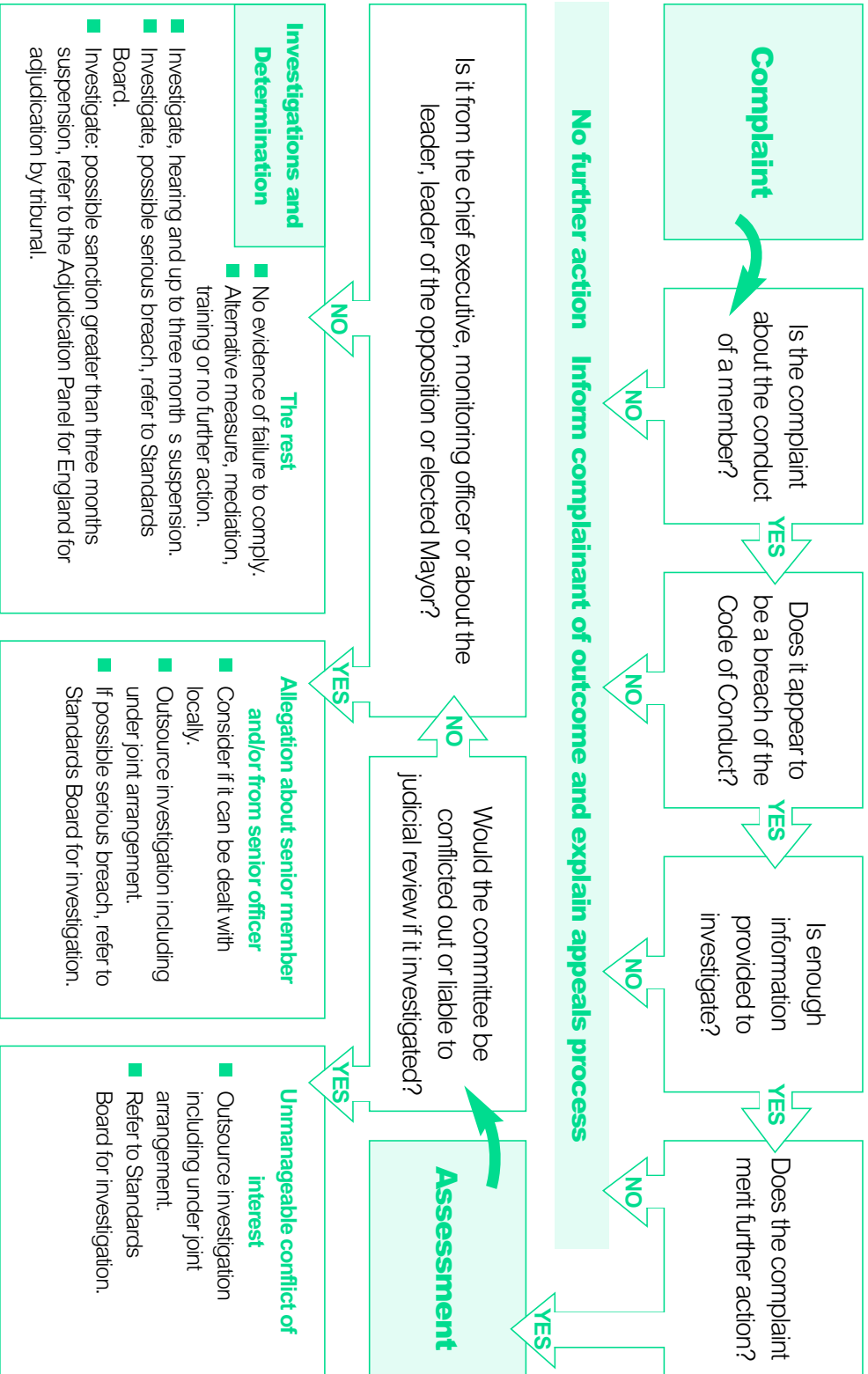
Which complaints are we unlikely to refer for investigation?

We are unlikely to decide that a complaint should be investigated if it falls into any of the following categories:-

- We believe it to be malicious, relatively minor or tit-for-tat;
- The same, or substantially similar, complaint has already been the subject of an investigation or enquiry and there is nothing further to be gained by seeking the sanctions available to the Adjudication Panel or the local Standards Committee;
- The complaint concerns acts carried out in the Members' private life when they are not carrying out the work of the Authority or have not misused their position as a Member;
- It appears that the complaint is really about dissatisfaction with a Council decision;
- There is not enough information currently available to justify a decision to refer the matter for investigation.

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Local assessment complaint handling chart



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Agenda Item 5

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Agenda Item 6

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