
Standards Committee

Report of the meeting held on 10th September 2015.

Matters for Information

5. UPDATE ON CODE OF CONDUCT AND REGISTER OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

The Monitoring Officer has updated the Committee on the adoption of a Code of Conduct by Town and Parish Councils and the receipt and publication of register of interests forms on behalf of District and Town and Parish Councillors. The Monitoring Officer has a duty to establish and maintain a register of disclosable pecuniary interests.

The Committee has noted that all of the 71 Town and Parish Councils have adopted a Code of Conduct, with 55 based on that adopted by the District Council, 12 have opted for the Code promoted by the National Association of Local Councils and the remaining four Councils have adopted their own version of the Code. Of the 71 Town and Parish Councils, 60 have had their full Register published (which comprise the Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI) forms of all Councillors). Clerks from the remaining 11 Parish Councils have been reminded to send in outstanding DPI forms as soon as possible.

In terms of individual DPis, 586 of a total of 650 have been received from Parish Councillors, 26 are outstanding and 38 are vacancies. The forms of all District Councillors are published.

The Committee has considered how to ensure the outstanding DPis are received. Although the Monitoring Officer has no enforcement powers, owing to the legal nature of the duty to publish DPis, it is felt that primary responsibility should remain with the Monitoring Officer, with support from relevant Ward Members.

6. COMPLAINTS

The Committee has been informed of complaints submitted to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) in 2013/14 and 2014/15. Responsibility for complaints transferred to the Committee in April 2014 but the LGO does not report until July each year. The Committee had not since had an opportunity to consider the previous year's letter.

The Committee has been informed that in 2013/14, of the 15 complaints that were the subject of investigations, three were upheld.

Brief explanations of the three cases have been received. No complaints were upheld in 2014/15.

With regard to internal complaints handling, the Committee has been acquainted with trends over the last six years. There has been a reduction in the number of complaints investigated in the period but the significant decline in complaints in the last year suggests there has been under-reporting. For this reason and because a review is now due, a revised policy and internal guidance will be submitted to the Committee for approval in the autumn.

7. ELECTORAL BOUNDARY REVIEW

The Committee has been acquainted with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) process for the electoral review of Huntingdonshire. The first phase of the review is for the Council to produce a submission to the LGBC, which provides a rationale, backed up with evidence, for a proposed Council size. The timescale for completion of this work is very short, so a working group comprising representatives from political groups has been convened to make a recommendation on the number of councillors the Council needs.

The Committee has reviewed the detailed submission, which has been prepared to support the retention of 52 Members. The submission appears elsewhere on the Council Agenda. Subject to strengthening the Council's case through the inclusion of sources for the figures provided, the Committee has recommended the Council to approve the submission on Council size.

The Committee will continue to be involved in the remaining stages of the review.

A Hansard
Chairman