

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Standards Committee

21 November 2019

TITLE:	Standards Committee Annual Report 2018/19
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Sybil Ralphs - Council Leader
CONTACT OFFICER:	Linden Vernon - Senior Officer (Governance and Member Support)
WARDS INVOLVED:	Non-Specific

Appendices A - Role of the Committee

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 To review the work of the Standards Committee during 2018/2019.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the report be noted.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 This report provides an overview of the issues considered by the Standards Committee during 2018/19. This included the following matters:

- Monitoring complaints received regarding alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct
- The Annual Letter received from the Local Government Ombudsman
- Annual Review of Councillor Development
- Committee on Standards in Public Life - Ethical Standards Review

4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 High standards of conduct are integral to the Council achieving its corporate priorities.

5. Alternative Options

5.1 There are no options to consider.

Mark Trillo

Executive Director (People) and Monitoring Officer

Web Links and Background Papers

[Standards Committee Reports](#)
[Committee on Standards in Public Life – 7 Principles of Public Life](#)

Contact details

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6. Detail

6.1 Article 9 of the Council's Constitution defines the role of the Standards Committee and is shown in full in **Appendix A** to this report. In summary this includes:

- To promote high standards of conduct by elected and co-opted members and staff
- To advise the Council, monitor the operation and provide training/notes on local codes of conduct, protocols or other ethical guidance for Members and staff
- Granting dispensations to District Councillors
- To consider and where necessary take action regarding complaints for breaches of the Code of Conduct
- To promote Member development and training on ethics and standards generally within the District Council
- To monitor the Council's corporate complaints procedure including any references to the Local Government or Housing Ombudsman and to consider any implications for the Council's codes, protocols or ethical guidance
- To advise the Council on the adoption or revision of the Constitution

6.2 The current membership of the committee is provided below. The Council's Independent Persons continue to be invited to attend and participate at Committee meetings.

Standards Committee Composition	
District Councillors	Councillor Geoff Bond (Chair) Councillor Ben Emery (Vice-Chair) Councillor James Aberley Councillor Ian Herdman Councillor Kevin J Jackson Councillor Brian Johnson Councillor Kate Martin Councillor Phil Taylor Councillor Peter Wilkinson

Standards Committee Composition	
Town/Parish representatives (non-voting)	Cllr David Fowler Cllr Barbara Hughes
Independent Persons	Mr Harry Mawdsley Mr Philip Brough (substitute)

Monitoring complaints received regarding alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct

6.3 The Committee continued to receive regular complaint monitoring reports regarding alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct. These reports updated members on the number and nature of complaints dealt with by the Monitoring Officer and explained:

- If these related to borough or town/parish councillors
- If any further action should be taken
- If further investigations were considered to be appropriate

6.4 This information is then used to identify trends and consider themes for which training seminars may be planned. The table below summarises the complaints received for the previous years and compares these with the Authority's Strategic Alliance partner, High Peak Borough Council (HPBC).

Year	No. of Complaints					
	Staffordshire Moorlands Parish Cllr	Staffordshire Moorlands District Cllr	Staffordshire Moorlands Total	High Peak Parish Cllr	High Peak Borough Cllr	High Peak Total
2013/14	3	1	4	10	1	11
2014/15	5	1	6	2	1	3
2015/16	3	12	15	4	0	4
2016/17	9	16	25	4	2	6
2017/18	5	8	13	1	3	4
2018/19	2	9	11	2	1	3

The Annual Letter received from the Local Government Ombudsman

6.5 The Annual Letter of the Local Government Ombudsman was considered by the Committee at its meeting in November 2018. The table below provides a summary of the number of complaints dealt with by the Ombudsman set against the total number of complaints received by the Authority. For comparison purposes figures for previous years are also provided together with details for HPBC.

Year	No. of Ombudsman Complaints			
	SMDC		HPBC	
	No. of Enquiries or Complaints	Total Number of Complaints	No. of Enquiries or Complaints	Total Number of Complaints
2012/13	14	439	10	404
2013/14	12	280	20*	372
2014/15	10	284	12	413
2015/16	13	258	11	368
2016/17	10	245	8*	448
2017/18	12	193	15	308

* This includes one complaint from the Housing Ombudsman Service.

- 6.6 The relatively small number of complaints that reach the Ombudsman compared to the total number of complaints received by the Authority illustrates the strength of the Council in ensuring complaints are dealt with promptly and appropriately.

Annual Review of Councillor Development

- 6.7 The Member Development Working Group co-ordinates the Council's learning and development programme for councillors. It is a cross-party group, which is chaired by Councillor David Shaw.
- 6.8 The Learning and Development Programme is focused on responding to members' training requirements and also aims to address any changes in legislation and the Council's priorities.
- 6.9 Generally, all Members are invited to attend all events, with some seminars, particularly around regulatory matters, such as Planning and Licensing, being essential for members of those committees to attend in order to fulfil requirements as set out in the Council's Constitution.
- 6.10 The Development Programme included the following seminars during the previous 2018/19 (sessions are open to all councillors unless otherwise stated):

Seminar	No. of District Councillors in attendance
Risk Management Training (also attended by an independent person) – open to members of the Audit & Accounts Committee	5
Planning Training – open to members of the Planning Applications Committee	9
General Data Protection Regulation Training (also attended by 31 parish councillors)	10

Seminar	No. of District Councillors in attendance
Planning Training – open to members of the Planning Applications Committee	5
Planning Committee Highways – open to members of the Planning Applications Committee Training	8
Planning Committee Highways Training	7
Emergency Planning Briefing	14

6.11 In addition to the main development programme, support was on-going around Members' use of IT. This includes guidance on use of tablet computers and the Council's committee management system, Modern.Gov. This has been done via group training sessions, drop in sessions and 1:1s as required.

Committee on Standards in Public Life - Ethical Standards Review

6.12 The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) considers that robust standards arrangements are needed to safeguard local democracy, maintain high standards of conduct, and to protect ethical practice in local government.

6.13 In 2018, the CSPL undertook a review of local government ethical standards. The Council responded to the consultation exercise which informed the report. The Committee considered the report's findings which included areas such as:

- The use of Codes of Conduct
- Allegations of bullying
- The use of Social Media
- Sanctions available
- The role of the Independent Person, Monitoring Officer, Local Government Ombudsman and Parish Clerks
- Arrangements for disclosure of interests
- The intimidation of councillors

6.14 The Committee received a further report on these findings in July 2019.

6.15 To mark the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the CSPL in October 2019 it has published a series of short films about the 7 Nolan Principles of Public Life and what they mean in practice. The films can be viewed [here](#).