

**HIGH PEAK BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Standards Committee**

**13 November 2024**

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Standards Committee Annual Report</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR:</b>	<b>Councillor Anthony McKeown – Council Leader</b>
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Linden Vernon – Head of Democratic Services</b>
<b>WARDS INVOLVED:</b>	<b>Non-Specific</b>

**Appendices Attached – Appendix A – Role of the Committee**

**1. Reason for the Report**

1.1 To review the work of the Standards Committee during 2023/2024.

**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 2023/24. This included the following matters:

- Councillor Induction Programme
- Code of Conduct - Dispensations
- Local Government Ombudsman Annual Letter
- Monitoring complaints received regarding alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct

**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 (Governance and Commissioning)**

### Web Links and Background Papers

[Standards Committee Reports](#)

### 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:

- Promoting high standards of conduct amongst councillors and making sure they are properly trained
- Granting dispensations to Borough councillors
- Ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place for dealing with allegations into breaches of the Code of Conduct
- Hearing representations from councillors who may become disqualified for not attending meetings
- Advising the Council on Members' allowances

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

Borough Councillors	Cllr Payge Hacking (Chair) Cllr Rachel Quinn (Vice-Chair) Cllr Stewart Gardner Cllr Nigel Gourlay Cllr David Lomax Cllr Jo Taylor
Co-opted Town/Parish representatives (non-voting)	Vacant positions x 2
Independent Persons	Mr Philip Carnall Mr John Berrisford (substitute) Miss Victoria Miller (substitute) Mr Peter Turner (substitute)

## Councillor Induction Programme

- 6.3 The Committee considered a report on the delivery of the Councillors' Induction Programme following the 2023 elections.
- 6.4 This was developed prior to the local elections in conjunction with the Executive Councillor with responsibility for Member Development. The programme took into account the priority areas for the Council, feedback received following the Corporate Peer Challenge, the Review of Scrutiny and 2019 induction process as well as learnings from best practice.
- 6.5 The programme included a number of additional for the reasons as set out below:
- Delivery of Council Housing – to assist with the achievement of the requirements of the Social Housing White Paper.
  - Effective Overview and Scrutiny – as recommended by the review conducted by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. This focused on question techniques to encourage engagement and support for committee chairs.
  - Partnership Working – added following a recommendation from the Corporate Peer Challenge.
  - The Council's approach to tackling climate change – this was ranked as a high priority following a survey of councillors in 2022.
- 6.6 Priority areas for member training, such as training in regulatory matters (including Development Control), were delivered to enable members to participate on those committees. Bite size briefings had also been provided at the start of each Select Committee meeting to provide information on the Select Committee and scrutiny process within the Council's decision making structure, together with an overview of the role and remit of each committee.
- 6.7 All town / parish councillors, clerks and Independent Persons were invited to attend the Code of Conduct Training.
- 6.8 All newly elected councillors from across the country were invited to attend the LGA National Welcome Event which was held virtually. The event provided an introduction to the LGA and the support available to newly elected members
- 6.9 Representatives of the LGA attended the Welcome Meeting and also delivered a session of Charing Skills training together with a LGA Peer in November.
- 6.10 New councillors were invited to attend a development session for newly elected East Midlands councillors on 14 July, the aim of which was to cover a range of national and regional issues as well as further understanding their local ward role and providing networking opportunities with other newly elected and experienced councillors from across the region.
- 6.11 Information and resources were available via the Councillors' Portal including online training and a comprehensive range of workbooks produced by the Local Government Association, and members were encouraged to access

these materials independently. Updated information around ward profiles taking into account data from the 2021 Census was also available via the Councillors' Portal.

- 6.12 The majority of sessions were organised internally and delivered by Council officers, as this method had previously proved to be the most cost effective and feedback from councillors supported the use of in-house expertise. A number of sessions were delivered via Teams to enable sessions to be recorded and made available for councillors to view at a later time. Some sessions were also delivered virtually on an Alliance wide basis, which reduced costs and contributed to the Alliance's climate change agenda.
- 6.13 Members are requested to complete evaluation forms after each session. Scores and comments would be compiled and circulated to each course provider to be used to inform the structure and content of future courses. Sessions had been well attended and feedback received was positive, with councillors commenting that they felt motivated and informed to undertake their roles.
- 6.14 All new Councillors had been provided with IT equipment to enable them to fulfil their roles and training is provided on an on-going basis. There was also a rolling programme to replace returning councillors' IT equipment.

### **Code of Conduct - Dispensations**

- 6.15 Members considered the grant of dispensations to councillors. Section 33 of the Localism Act made provision for the circumstances where dispensations may be granted. The power to grant dispensations has been delegated by Council to the Standards Committee, in consultation with the Independent Person.
- 6.16 Previously, under the old Code of Conduct, general exemptions were provided to all councillors with regard to prejudicial interests in any business of the authority where that business related to certain functions of the authority.
- 6.17 The arrangements introduced by the Localism Act 2011 did not reproduce these exemptions and as a result councillors could effectively breach the Code of Conduct should they take part in a meeting where any of these matters were being discussed and they have a disclosable pecuniary interest in the matter. The Council's Standards Committee had therefore previously granted dispensations relating cases where the number of members that would be prohibited from participating/voting would be so great that it would impede any particular transaction of business in addition to matters relating to allowances, Council Tax and housing matters. It was also proposed that dispensations were approved with regards to Council Tax premiums and councillors attending meetings remotely where a formal decision is not required to be made.

## The Annual Letter received from the Local Government Ombudsman

6.18 The Annual Letter of the Local Government Ombudsman was considered by the Committee at its meeting in November 2023. 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 SMDC the Authority's Strategic Alliance partner, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (SMDC).

Year	No. of Ombudsman Complaints			
	HPBC		SMDC	
	No. of Enquiries or Complaints	Total Number of Complaints	No. of Enquiries or Complaints	Total Number of Complaints
2012/13	10	404	14	439
2013/14	20	372	12	280
2014/15	12	413	10	284
2015/16	11	368	13	258
2016/17	8	448	10	245
2017/18	15	308	12	193
2018/19	7	223	6	119
2019/20	6	150	5	82
2020/21	5	52	5	52
2021/22	9	142	7	76
2022/23	11	153	2	92

6.19 The Ombudsman upheld 2 complaints during 2022/23. 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.

### Monitoring complaints received regarding alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct

6.20 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

6.21 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 SMDC.

Year	No. of Complaints					
	High Peak Parish Cllr	High Peak Borough Cllr	High Peak Total	Staffordshire Moorlands Parish Cllr	Staffordshire Moorlands District Cllr	Staffordshire Moorlands Total
2013/14	10	1	11	3	1	4
2014/15	2	1	3	5	1	6
2015/16	4	0	4	3	12	15
2016/17	4	2	6	9	16	25
2017/18	1	3	4	5	8	13
2018/19	2	1	3	2	9	11
2019/20	19	1	20	6	26	32
2020/21	19	1	20	3	5	8
2021/22	4	1	5	7	8	15
2022/23	7	0	7	2	6	8
2023/24	2	1	3	8	4	12