

Report to: **Standards Committee**

Date: **26 May 2010**

Title of report: **Annual Report of the Standards Committee**

By: **Director of Governance and Community Services**

Purpose of report: **To provide an update on Member Conduct issues, the work of the Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer.**

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Standards Committee is recommended to

- 1) note the report; and
  - 2) recommend to County Council the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for consideration
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### **1. Financial Implications**

1.1 There are no financial implications to this report.

### **2. Background information**

2.1 In July 2007 the revised Code of Conduct was adopted by the Council, and all Members were offered training on the new Code. Additionally, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 introduced changes to ethical standards, which placed additional responsibility on the Standards Committee locally for dealing with complaints of breach of the Code of Conduct.

2.2 In December 2008 the Standards Committee agreed the assessment criteria that would provide additional support and guidance for the assessment and review Sub-Committees when considering complaints.

2.2 Between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010 there have been four complaints received against Members of the County Council (see Appendix 1). These complaints were considered by the Assessment Sub Committee. Of the four complaints, it was decided that three of the complaints did not constitute a breach of the Code and therefore required no further action. In one instance it was decided to refer the allegation to the Monitoring Officer for further investigation unless agreement could be reached that the Councillor offered an appropriate public apology within 40 working days and undertook appropriate training. The decision notices have been attached as item 1 to the Agenda.

2.3 It is considered that the standards of conduct among Members and co-opted members of the Council remain high and maintaining good standards is taken seriously. Although four cases were considered by the Assessment Sub-Committee in the period covered by this report, in comparison to only one in the previous period, it is considered that this could be due to increased awareness of channels available for making complaints. In comparison to neighbouring authorities our levels of complaints received are relatively low.

### **3. Applications for Dispensation**

3.1 In limited circumstances, Members can apply in writing to the Standards Committee for dispensations to take part in business that they would otherwise have been unable to participate in through having prejudicial interests. In the period between the last report in November 2008 to date, there have been no applications for dispensations.

3.2 All dispensations are entered on the register of Members' interests and remain there for the appropriate period, normally for 4 years from the date on which they were granted, or (if shorter) until the date fixed by the Committee granting the dispensation.

### **4. Register of Members' Interests**

4.1 The Monitoring Officer is required to establish and maintain a register of interests of Members of the Council. All Members have completed and returned their registers and are reminded every six months of the need to notify the Monitoring Officer of any changes. The registers are available for public inspection and details are also available on the website.

4.2 A register of Gifts and Hospitality is also maintained by the Monitoring Officer. During the period of this report 5 Members have had cause to register one or more gifts and hospitality received with an estimated value of £25 or more.

4.3 There is an ongoing requirement to keep the information up to date. Councillors must within 28 days of becoming aware of any new registerable personal interest or change to any registered interest, give written notification to the Monitoring Officer.

### **5. Training**

5.1 Members were offered training on the Code of Conduct in June 2009, although this was not taken up by all Members. Training attendance is a factor to be considered in any complaint.

### **6. Recommendations**

6.1 The Committee is recommended to note the report and to recommend to County Council the Annual Report of the Standards for consideration.

PHILIP BAKER

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Local Members: All

Background Documents: None