

# *Standards Committee Annual Report 2017/2018*

**A Message from Councillor Suresh Patel, Chair, Standards Committee** **DRAFT**

This is the first Annual Report of the Standards Committee. It has been an extremely busy year for the Standards Committee. Instead of a complete commentary of all that Standards has achieved over the year this Annual Report provides a summary of the key highlights of the work Standards has been engaged in during 2017/2018

The Standards Committee promotes and maintains high standards of conduct. The Members of the Standards Committee have a common interest in that they believe in principled local politics and value their role as champions of high standards of conduct amongst local politicians.

In summary the work of the Standards Committee includes:

- Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct
- Assisting Councillors and Co-Opted Members to observe Northampton Borough Council's Code of Conduct
- Monitoring the operation of the Code of Conduct
- Work through its Working Group (Work Plan)
- Producing and adopting a Training Strategy – Ethical and Governance Matters-  
Ethical Governance, Whistle Blowing and Complaints Handling

I would like to thank everyone for their endeavour to uphold these standards. My thanks are particularly extended to the Independent Persons for their input into Code of Conduct complaints.

I am also delighted to welcome our co-optees that joined the Standards Committee during 2017/2018.

It is clear that maintaining good standards of conduct is taken seriously by the Council. The Standards Committee believes that this can only serve to improve public confidence.



**Councillor Suresh Patel**  
**Chair, Standards Committee**

# *Standards Committee Annual Report 2017/2018*

## **Introduction**

The Council has a duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-Opted Members and the Council aims to have the highest possible ethical standards in place across the Council.

## **Membership of the Standards Committee 2017/2018**

The Standards Committee comprises 9 Borough Councillor Members, 2 Parish Council Co Opted Members and 2 Independent Co-opted Members:

### **Borough Councillors**

Councillor Suresh Patel (Chair)

Councillor Brian Oldham (Deputy Chair)

Councillors Alan Bottwood, Andrew Kilbride, Brian Markham, Les Marriott, Nilesh Parekh, Catherine Russell, Zoe Smith

### **Co Optees – Parish Councillors**

Councillor Linda Hook

Councillor David Lewis

### **Co-Optees – Independent Members**

Kim Holland

Roger Rumsey

### **Independent Persons**

Under the Localism Act 2011, the Council was required to appoint one or more Independent Persons to assist in the Standards process. The functions of the Independent Persons are:

- they must be consulted by the authority and their views taken into account before the authority makes a finding as to whether a member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct or decides on action to be taken in respect of that member. (This means that their views must be sought on a decision to take no action where the investigation finds no evidence of breach or, where the investigation finds evidence that there has been a breach, on any local resolution of the complaint, or on any finding of breach and on any decision on action as a result of that finding);
- they may be consulted by the authority in respect of a standards complaint at any other stage; and
- they may be consulted by a member or co-opted member of the Borough Council or of a Parish Council against whom a complaint has been made.

## *Standards Committee Annual Report 2017/2018*

In June 2013 the Council appointed the following Independent Persons:

**Peter Glover.** Prior to retiring in 2010, Peter Glover had a thirty year career with Northamptonshire Police Force during which time he gained experience of dealing with a variety of public bodies. As a senior police officer, Peter Glover gained extensive experience of undertaking disciplinary procedures and interpreting law and policy guidelines.

**Alan Haynes.** Alan Haynes qualified as a Chartered Engineer and had various roles in the railway industry, including roles associated with Health and Safety. Alan Haynes retired in 2006 and since 2010 has been the Northamptonshire Chair of the Independent Panel for Councillors' Allowances (the "IPCA"). In addition to the direct experience of local authorities gained through sitting on the IPCA, Alan Haynes encountered a variety of different public bodies in the course of his career in the railway industry.

During 2017/2018 the Independent Persons have been involved in 11 cases, some of which were carried over from 2016/2017.

### **Code of Conduct**

Complaints about councillors are dealt with as part of the council's standards process.

The Localism Act 2011 has changed the standards regime in local government. These changes came into effect from 1st July 2012. The council is in the process of updating the information on its website to reflect this new situation.

The council has recently agreed a new code of conduct for borough councillors and new arrangements for dealing with complaints against councillors.

This council's arrangements for dealing with complaints against councillors also apply to complaints made about parish councillors within the borough of Northampton.

Each parish council is responsible for adopting a code of conduct for its parish councillors. If you wish to view a parish council's code of conduct, you should inspect any website operated by the parish council and request the parish clerk to allow you to inspect the parish council's code of conduct.

During 2017/2018 the Standards Committee undertook a review of the Arrangements for dealing with complaints in accordance with the Code of Conduct and made some changes.

# *Standards Committee Annual Report 2017/2018*

## **Code of Conduct Complaints**

During 2017/2018 the number of complaints regarding alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct were as follows:

### **Borough Councillor**

(i)

The complaint was received on 25 March 2017. The file is still open. The determination of the initial assessment of the complaint was that the complaint is held in abeyance pending the outcome of a separate investigation.

(ii)

The complaint was received on 4 September 2017. The file was closed on 7 November 2017.

The determination of the initial assessment of the complaint was that the complaint should be dealt with by alternative resolution, a facilitated discussion between the Monitoring Officer's representative, the complainant and the complainant's representative took place.

(iii)

The complaint was received on 20 September 2017. The file was closed on 17 October 2017.

The determination of the initial assessment of the complaint was that this matter did not warrant any formal action.

(iv)

The complaint was received on 13 September 2017. The file is still live.

The determination of the initial assessment of the complaint was that the complaint would be referred to an investigation. An Investigator has been appointed and the report is awaited.

(v)

The complaint was received on 17 November 2017. The file was closed on 20 December 2017.

The initial assessment has been held recently and the determination of this was that the complaint should be dealt with by alternative resolution. The subject Member was asked to provide a written apology to the complainant.

## *Standards Committee Annual Report 2017/2018*

### **Parish Councillor**

(vi)

The complaint was received on 2 May 2017. The file was closed on 23 May 2017.

The determination of the initial assessment of the complaint was that this matter did not warrant any formal action.

(vii)

The complaint was received on 3 July 2017. The file was closed on 6 July 2017.

The complaint was outside the scope of the Arrangements. The complainant was advised to redirect their complaint to the Parish Council

### **Work of the Standards Committee during 2017/2018**

During the year the Standards Committee has met four times. Its work consisted of:

Approval of the first Work Plan of the Standards Committee

Approval of the first Annual Report of the Standards Committee

Approval of the first Training Strategy for the Standards Committee

Approval of the first Communication Strategy for the Standards Committee

Setting up its Working Group (Work Plan) that has the following Terms of Reference:

To produce a draft Work Plan for the Standards Committee for the Municipal Year 2017/2018 for the approval of the Standards Committee.

To suggest items for inclusion on the agenda of meetings of the Standards Committee, based on the content of the Work Plan.

To action items on the Work Plan, as necessary, prior to, or following, their consideration by the Standards Committee; this will include carrying out reviews, commenting on draft Strategies, Policies, Codes and other Council documents within the remit of the Standards Committee.

Review of the Whistleblowing Policy

Recruitment of Co-Optees (Parish Councillors and Independent) to the Committee

Approval of Gifts and Hospitality – Guidance for Councillors

Approval of the Employee's Code of Conduct

Updates on the current status of live complaints and complaints closed since the previous update

Approval of the Work Plan for the Committee for 2018/2019

# *Standards Committee Annual Report 2017/2018*

## **Training and Development**

In accordance with its Training Strategy – Ethical and Governance Standards; training regarding:

Code of Conduct

Declaration of Interest

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality

The session was delivered by a Senior Solicitor of the Council and excellent feedback was received from those in attendance, which included Borough Councillors, Parish Councillors and co optees to the Standards Committee.

In accordance with issues listed on the Training Strategy, further sessions are planned for the year 2018/2019

## **Future Activity**

The Work Plan for 2017/2018 will including standing annual items but will evolve as necessary during the year; taking into account any developing issues pertaining to standards.

## *Standards Committee Annual Report 2017/2018*

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