

HIGH PEAK BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Standards Committee

15 November 2018

TITLE:	Standards Committee Annual Report 2017/18
EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR:	Councillor Thrane- Executive Councillor for Finance and Operational Services
CONTACT OFFICER:	Linden Vernon – Senior Officer (Governance and Member Support)
WARDS INVOLVED:	Non-Specific

Appendix A – Role of the Committee

1. Reason for the Report

1.1 To review the work of the Standards Committee during 2017/2018.

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 2017/18. 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
- Review of the Council's Local Ethical Framework
- An annual review of Councillor development
- Department for Communities and Local Government consultation on updating disqualification criteria for local authority members
- Local government ethical standards consultation

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](#)

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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 Persons continue to be invited to attend and participate at Committee meetings.

Borough Councillors	Cllr Clive Johnson (Chair) Cllr Fiona Sloman (Vice-Chair) Cllr Caroline Howe Cllr John Kappes Cllr Graham Oakley Cllr Rachel Quinn
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Co-opted Town/Parish representatives (non-voting)	Cllr Tim Norton Vacant Position
Independent Persons	Mr Peter Matthews Mr Philip Carnall (Substitute) Mr Peter Grant (Substitute) Mrs Cheryl Morgan (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, town or 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, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

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

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 2017. 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 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

* 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.

Review of Local Ethical Framework

- 6.7 In July 2017 the Committee reviewed and approved a revised Local Ethical Framework which draws together various Council policies to ensure high standards of ethical behaviour and good governance throughout the Authority. The Framework included a commitment to review the document to ensure that it is entirely “fit for purpose” and reflects all relevant best practice guidance.
- 6.8 The revision took into account consequential amendments including the adoption of the Local Public Services Senior Managers’ Code of Ethics and revised core principles for good governance held within the Council’s Code of Corporate Governance.

Annual Review of Councillor Development

- 6.9 A report was presented to the Committee in November 2017 which reviewed the Development Programme for councillors. This was focused on consolidating members’ requirements following the completion of the Induction Programme implemented after the May 2015 local elections. The programme also aimed to address any changes in legislation and the Council’s priorities.
- 6.10 A total of 7 sessions had been held. These included regulatory updates for licensing/development control, a Customer Service Day, using the Modern.Gov tablet application and the Big Energy Saving Network.

- 6.11 Members are requested to complete evaluation forms after each session. Scores and comments are compiled and circulated to the course providers and are used to inform the structure and content of future courses.
- 6.12 The majority of sessions were organised internally and delivered by officers. This has been shown to be a very cost effective method and the feedback from councillors supports the use of in-house expertise.

Department for Communities and Local Government consultation on updating disqualification criteria for local authority members

- 6.13 The Committee was presented with a report with regards to a consultation conducted by the Department for Communities and Local Government on proposals to update the criteria for disqualifying individuals from standing for, or holding office as, a local authority member, directly-elected mayor or member of the London Assembly.
- 6.14 A response was subsequently submitted on behalf of the Council. The Government has recently responded to the consultation and stated that it believes that where an individual is subject to the notification requirements set out in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 or the subject of anti-social behaviour sanctions they should be barred from standing for election. Where an individual is subject to a Sexual Risk Order, they should be prohibited from standing for election. Any changes to disqualification criteria will require changes to primary legislation. The Government will look to identify a suitable legislative opportunity when parliamentary time allows.

Local Government Ethical Standards Consultation

- 6.15 The Committee considered a report with regards to a consultation exercise to review local government ethical standards by the Committee for Standards in Public Life. Discussion included the types of sanctions currently available, allegations made against parish councillors and circumstances which may trigger an investigation.
- 6.16 The committee also considered requirements for declaration of interests at meetings. This included the potential advantages of declaring a conflict of loyalty as a type of interest at meetings, as used by some other organisations. It was thought that this may sometimes enable a councillor, not involved in making the decision, to continue to provide useful background information during meetings where they may have an overlapping role (e.g. representation of the Council to an outside body). Discussion also included the possible addition of a “right to make representations” for councillors at meetings such as Development Control Committee.