

# **STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING**

### **Minutes**

**THURSDAY, 21 NOVEMBER 2019**

PRESENT: Councillor G Bond (Chair)

Councillors B Emery, I Herdman, Councillor B A Hughes,  
K J Jackson, B Johnson, K Martin and P Taylor, Mr H Mawdsley  
and Mr P Brough.

IN ATTENDANCE:

APOLOGIES: Councillors J Aberley and P Wilkinson

9 **URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS, IF ANY (24 HOURS NOTICE TO BE PROVIDED TO THE CHAIRMAN).**

There were no urgent items.

10 **TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING.**

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 19 July 2019 be **APPROVED** as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

11 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY:**

There were no declaration made.

12 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL LETTER**

The annual review letter summarised complaints and enquiries made during 2018/19. 5 new enquiries / complaints had been made, of which 2 were not upheld and 3 were closed after initial enquiries, with no prospect of finding maladministration in any of the cases. All 5 related to the Planning & Development service area. 1 further case had been referred back for local resolution, relating to the Housing service area and may still have been in the pipeline at the time of this meeting.

When compared against the total of 119 complaints received by the Council for the same period, the small number of complaints reaching the Ombudsman illustrated the strength of the Council in ensuring complaints were dealt with promptly and appropriately.

**RESOLVED** – That the report and Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter be **NOTED**.

13 **STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT**

## Standards Committee (SMDC)- 21 November 2019

The report gave an overview of the issues considered by the Standards Committee during 2018/19 including:-

- 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.

Regular complaint monitoring reports were received, establishing trends and identifying any themes for which training seminars may be planned. The last 6 years of complaints received by SMDC and its Strategic Alliance partner – HPBC – in respect of alleged breaches of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct were tabulated as follows:-

Year	No. of Complaints					
	SM Parish Cllr	SM District Cllr	SM Total	HP Parish Cllr	HP Borough Cllr	HP 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

Tabulated separately were complaints received in their entirety as opposed to those which reached the Ombudsman:-

Year	No. of Ombudsman Complaints			
	SMDC		HPBC	
	No. of Enquiries or Complaints	Total No. of Complaints	No. of Enquiries or Complaints	Total No. 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

The relatively small number of complaints reaching the Ombudsman compared to the total number illustrated the strength of the Council in ensuring that complaints were dealt with promptly and appropriately.

The cross-party Member Development Working Group had co-ordinated the learning and development programme for councillors and the resultant seminars were detailed, including the number of councillors attending each.

During 2018, the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) undertook a review of local government ethical standards. The Council responded to the consultation exercise and the resultant CSPL report was received in July 2019.

**Standards Committee (SMDC)- 21 November 2019**

**RESOLVED:** That the report be **NOTED**.

14 **APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSON**

A vacancy existed for a substitute Independent Person following the passing away of Mr. Barry Steans in 2018. The successful candidate would be invited to attend and participate at meetings of the Standards Committee and also the Audit & Accounts Committee. The vacancy was to be advertised on the Council's website and shortlisted candidates were to be interviewed by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee and the relevant Executive Director. A recommendation would then be made to Council for the resultant appointment to be made. An annual allowance of £478 plus 'out of pocket expenses' would be paid.

In response to a member enquiry, it was agreed that a Committee member from the opposition would be included in the interview process.

**RESOLVED** – To advertise for the position of Independent Person.

15 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED:**

That, pursuant to Section 100A(2) and (4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings whereby it is likely that confidential information as defined in Section 100A (3) of the Act would be disclosed to the public in breach of the obligation of confidence or exempt information as defined in Section 100 I (1) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act would be disclosed to the public by virtue of the Paragraphs indicated.

16 **TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING.**

Members considered the Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2019.

17 **STANDARDS COMPLAINTS - REVIEW & MONITORING REPORT**

Members considered a report on complaints made under the Code of Conduct in the period since the committee previously met.

The meeting closed at 10.25 am

\_\_\_\_\_ Chairman \_\_\_\_\_ Date