

**HIGH PEAK BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Standards Committee**

**23 March 2022**

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Standards Committee Annual Report</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR:</b>	<b>Councillor Alan Barrow - Executive Councillor for Corporate Services and Finance</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 2020/2021.

**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 2020/21. This included the following matters:

- Local Government Association - Model Member Code of Conduct
- Review into Ethical Standards by the Committee for Standards in Public Life
- Monitoring complaints received regarding alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct and outcome of reports after Independent Investigations into alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct
- The Annual Letter received from the Local Government Ombudsman
- Annual Review of Councillor Development

#### 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

Linden Vernon  
Head of Democratic Services  
linden.vernon@highpeak.gov.uk

#### 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 Rachel Quinn (Chair) Cllr Peter Roberts (Vice-Chair) Cllr Rachel Abbotts Cllr Tony Ashton Cllr Stewart Gardner Cllr Edith Longdon
Co-opted Town/Parish representatives (non-voting)	Vacant positions x 2
Independent Persons	Mr Peter Matthews Mr Philip Carnall (substitute) Vacant position (substitute)

## **Local Government Association (LGA) - Model Member Code of Conduct**

- 6.3 The Committee received two reports during the year which provided an update on the revised Local Government Association's Model Code of Conduct.
- 6.4 In 2018, the Committee for Standards in Public Life undertook a review of local government ethical standards. This found that there was inconsistency between codes of conduct in local authorities. It was therefore recommended that the LGA should produce a new national 'model code' which would take into account changes to the political environment, such as the increasing use of social media in public life, with the discretion for individual authorities to adapt the model code to fit local circumstances.
- 6.5 The LGA reviewed their previous Model Code and had conducted a consultation exercise. The final version of the Code will be offered as a template for councils to adopt in whole and/or with local amendments.
- 6.6 The updated Model Code was published in December 2020. The revised code included provisions for the use of social media by Members, it attempted to clarify when Members are determined to be acting in their official capacities and it re-enforced the provisions around preventing abusive, threatening and intimidating behaviour.
- 6.7 The Council's current code of conduct was approved in July 2019 after being revised in consideration of the best practice recommendations which had been set out in the ethical standards review. The Government has not yet responded to the formal recommendations within the review report. If the Government does choose to implement the formal recommendations it is likely that there will be legislative change and the code of conduct will require further amendment. A further report would be presented to Members of the Standards Committee at that stage.

## **Review into Ethical Standards by the Committee for Standards in Public Life**

- 6.8 The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) started a broad review of the infrastructure and institutions which deal with standards in public life. The Committee had identified a wide range of bodies involved in investigating, promoting, and maintaining standards, based on the Nolan principles. The Committee was consulting with stakeholders to determine the most appropriate way of promoting standards in public life through those institutions.
- 6.9 The review would look at best practice and identify any themes and gaps in the way the Seven Principles of Public Life are promoted and maintained. The Committee would also consider whether there were gaps or issues that required further work. The Committee wanted to check whether the Nolan principles were well understood, properly embedded and that they continued to reflect the standards expected by the public of those that serve them.

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

6.10 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

6.11 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 (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

6.12 Six complaints relating to members of Chapel-en-le-Frith Parish Council received since November 2019 have been referred for external investigation. The cost met by the Borough Council for these investigations has amounted to £20,282.40.

### The Annual Letter received from the Local Government Ombudsman

6.13 The Annual Letter of the Local Government Ombudsman was considered by the Committee at its meeting in November 2020. 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.

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

\* This includes one complaint from the Housing Ombudsman Service.

- 6.14 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.

### **Annual Review of Councillor Development**

- 6.15 The Councillor Development Programme from October 2019 comprised 10 sessions and had focused on consolidating members' training requirements following completion of the Councillor Induction Programme, together with addressing changes in legislation and the council's priorities.
- 6.16 The report also set out additional training undertaken by members in response to the Coronavirus Act and accompanying regulations to enable remote council meetings to take place.