
Monitoring Officer's Quarterly Update Report - 2016/17 Year End

Committee considering report:	Council
Date of Committee:	9 May 2017
Member:	Councillor Keith Chopping (Chairman of Governance and Ethics Committee)
Report Author:	Sarah Clarke
Forward Plan Ref:	C3083

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide an update on local and national issues relating to ethical standards and to bring to the attention of Members any complaints or other problems within West Berkshire.
- 1.2 To present the Annual Governance and Ethics Committee report to Full Council.

2. Recommendations:

- (1) Members are requested to note the content of the report.
- (2) The report to be circulated to all Parish/Town Councils in the District for information.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Financial:** There are no financial issues arising from this report. However the costs associated with external investigations and a lack of internal resources may lead to a budget pressure.
- 3.2 **Policy:** Revised policy and changes to processes adopted at Council in May 2012 and reviewed in December 2013 and September 2016.
- 3.3 **Personnel:** There are no personnel issues associated with this report.
- 3.4 **Legal:** There are no legal issues arising from this report. The matters covered by this report are generally requirements of the Local Government Act 2000 in so far as appropriate and the Localism Act 2011 and its supporting regulations.
- 3.5 **Risk Management:** The benefits of this process are the maintenance of the Council's credibility and good governance by a high standard of ethical behaviour. The threats are the loss of credibility of the Council if standards fall.
- 3.6 **Property:** There are no property issues associated with this report.
- 3.7 **Other:** A diminution in standards of behaviour by elected Members could have a significant reputational impact on

the Council.

4. Other options considered

4.1 None

Executive Summary

5. Introduction / Background

5.1 Following the enactment of the Localism Act 2011 a number of changes were made to the Standards Regime. As part of the governance arrangements it was agreed that the Monitoring Officer would make quarterly reports to Governance and Ethics Committee which set out the number and nature of complaints received and informed Members of any other activity that was taking place around the Code of Conduct regime. It was also agreed that an annual report would be presented to Full Council at the Annual meeting and that the year end report would be circulated to all Town and Parish Councils.

5.2 The key issues identified in the report are:

- Only one dispensation was granted in 2016/17 by the Monitoring Officer to allow Councillor Nick Goodes to speak and vote on matters pertaining to Council Tax. A four year dispensation (expiring in May 2019) remains in place for the other 51 Members to speak and vote on any items pertaining to Council Tax.
- The number of gifts and hospitality received by Members remains relatively low although this could be as a result of under reporting by Members.
- All elected Members of the West Berkshire Council have completed and submitted their Register of Interest forms.
- There has been a significant decrease in the number of complaints received in 2016/17. All three complaints received pertained to parish councillors Following the initial assessment it was agreed that one of these complaints would be investigated (NPC1/17), informal resolution was sought in respect of NPC2/17 and no further action was taken on NPC8/16.
- There will be some changes to the Parish Council representatives on the Governance and Ethics Committee and the Advisory Panel for 2017/18. Details are noted in the Supporting Information.

6. Proposal

6.1 Members are asked to note the content of the report and agree that it should be circulated to all Town and Parish Councils for information.

7. Conclusion

7.1 There has been a significant decrease in the number of complaints received in respect of alleged breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct during 2016/17. It is not clear whether the reduction in the number of complaints is due solely to compliance by Councillors with the Code of Conduct. It is possible that the limited sanctions available in the event of a breach has also deterred some complainants.

7.2 It is considered however that it is reasonable to conclude having regard to all the information in this report, that standards of ethical conduct are high across West Berkshire at both District and at Parish / Town Council levels.

8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix A – Supporting Information

8.2 Appendix B – Gifts and Hospitality Register