

TITLE OF REPORT : UPDATE ON MONITORING OFFICER WORK PROGRAMME

REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 A report to update the Standards Committee on the Monitoring Officer work programme and specific items linked to that work programme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Standards Committee note the content of the report.
- 2.2 That the Committee provide comment on the ongoing work, or ideas for other areas to be considered by the Monitoring Officer in the civic year 2014/15.
- 2.3 That the Standards Committee provide any specific comment regarding the Member Governance Training event planned for June 2014 and consider how widespread attendance can be encouraged.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure good governance within the Council.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 None.

5. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 5.1 None, although clerks of the parish councils will receive copies of this report.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain matters referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 Within its terms of reference the Standards Committee has a function “to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-Opted Members of the authority”. The Committee will therefore receive update reports from the Monitoring Officer on other policies and procedures that relate to, or assist to govern, Member conduct.

8. ISSUES

Complaints Update

- 8.1 Since the Standards Committee last met on 17 June 2013, there are the following updates in relation to complaints.
- At the time of the last Standards Committee meeting two complaints were ongoing and being considered by the Monitoring Officer. In relation to these two complaints, one complaint was withdrawn, the other complaint was reviewed by the Deputy Monitoring Officer and concluded that the complaint merited no further action.
 - There has been other discussion in relation to matters relating to potential complaints but those have not yet been formalised. The Committee will be updated at its next meeting.
- 8.2 It is worth noting that since the introduction of the new Standards Regime, the Monitoring Officer role has become increasingly involved in seeking to facilitate positive outcomes for parties that can often include informal interventions. The Monitoring Officer and HAPTC seek to liaise closely where difficulties arise to seek to ensure the best outcomes. By way of example, in one instance relating to a Parish Council, this has included attendance by the Monitoring Officer at a Parish Council meeting, with the offer to attend additional meetings, support to the Chair of the Council and offers of tailored training. In another instance, the Monitoring Officer has been involved working with other colleagues to facilitate discussion between aggrieved parties. Experience so far indicates that this can lead to more positive outcomes for all involved although not necessarily touching directly on the complaints process. A key point arising from this, is that business is sometimes transacted in a different way, and results in more independent monitoring officer intervention with less formal Member oversight.

Constitution Review

- 8.3 Member's will be aware that a Constitution Review Report went to full Council on 5 September 2013, and the Council is now operating with an updated and remodelled Constitution.
- 8.4 At their last Committee meeting Members considered a draft Member's Role Description. This was placed on the intranet and added to the new Member welcome pack.
- 8.5 Work is now underway in relation to the next Constitution Review, and the aim is to report that to Full Council on 9 April 2014, with recommended changes and updates. However it is not anticipated to be too extensive or far reaching, given the extent of the work undertaken in 2013.

Training for Members

- 8.6 In response to a report (Agenda Item 9) at the last Committee meeting, the Minutes record that:

The Committee discussed that, instead of a short session at the New Member Induction evening following the District Elections each year, the Monitoring Officer could consider an annual "event" to promote high standards of conduct to the newly-elected Councillors and to remind existing Councillors of the standards expected. The Committee felt that they could play a role in mentoring new Councillors on Standards matters. The Monitoring Officer requested that Standards Committee Members would engage with other Members of their Political Groups to ascertain exactly what type of standards training would be required in the future. The Committee requested that the Monitoring Officer report to a future meeting on proposed training for new and existing Councillors.

RESOLVED: That the Monitoring Officer report to a future meeting on proposed training for new and existing Councillors, including potential involvement of Standards Committee Members. Committee resolved:

- 8.7 The Monitoring Officer has been working with the Councils Human Resource Development Manager and liaising with the Democratic Services Manager and Chair of the Standards Committee. It is proposed to run a Governance training session in June 2014 (date to be confirmed). The event will be targeted at new and existing members, facilitated by an external trainer, and supported by the Monitoring Officer. The intention is to arrange a training session that is informal, engaged and interactive. District and Parish Council Members will be invited.
- 8.8 Depending on attendance numbers, the Monitoring Officer would intend to offer to other Councils in the County the opportunity for their Members to attend.
- 8.9 Linking to the previous Committee meeting, it would remain helpful if members of the Committee could report back to the Monitoring Officer with any feedback from their Political Groups regarding any detail of specific topics to cover as part of the Training, or any other more general comments and feedback. This will enable the training session to be tailored to best suit the needs of Members. The Monitoring Officer circulated an Advice Note on in relation to Declaration of Interests at the end of last year, that may have triggered some comment. The Monitoring Officer would be grateful for consideration by the Committee of ways to encourage attendance at the training by Members once the details are confirmed and advised to Members.
- 8.10 Proposed key topics to cover include:
- The Member's Code of Conduct
 - Declarations of Interests
 - Bias and predetermination
 - Principles of good decision making

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. Legal implications will be dealt with when each of the work programme matters are brought back to the Committee.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The costs of the training will be covered by the Member Development budget.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Appropriate policy frameworks help to ensure good governance of the Council and therefore reduce risk of poor practice or unsafe decision making.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 None. Implications will be considered in relation to the specific areas of work identified.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 None.

14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

14.1 None. The work outlined within the report is within the Monitoring Officer's workstream.

15. APPENDICES

15.1 None

16. CONTACT OFFICERS

16.1 Katie White Corporate Legal Manager and Monitoring Officer
katie.white@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4315

17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 None.