

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



8 October 2021

Our Ref Standards Committee/19 October 2021
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To: The Chair and Members of the Standards Committee of North Hertfordshire District Council

District Councillors Councillor Judi Billing MBE (Chair), Councillor Ruth Brown (Vice-Chair), Councillor Kate Aspinwall, Councillor Clare Billing, Councillor Sam Collins, Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Councillor David Levett, Councillor Gerald Morris, Councillor Sean Prendergast, Councillor Mike Rice, Councillor Claire Strong, Councillor Mandi Tandi, Councillor Richard Thake, Parish Councillor Rebecca Elliott, Parish Councillor Martin Griffin, Nicholas Moss OBE, Peter Chapman and John Richardson

(Substitutes: Councillors Councillor Ian Albert, Councillor Simon Bloxham, Councillor Paul Clark, Councillor George Davies, Councillor Simon Harwood, Councillor Michael Muir, Councillor Lisa Nash and Councillor Adem Ruggiero-Cakir)

Parish Councillors Parish Councillors Rebecca Elliott and Martin Griffin, Nicholas Moss OBE, Peter Chapman and John Richardson (Co-opted non-voting Members)

Independent Persons Nicholas Moss OBE (Independent Person)
Peter Chapman and John Richardson (Reserve Independent Person) – advisory roles

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

to be held in the

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERON
ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY**

On

TUESDAY, 19TH OCTOBER, 2021 AT 7.30 PM

Yours sincerely,

Jeanette Thompson
Service Director – Legal and Community

****MEMBERS PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU DOWNLOAD ALL AGENDAS AND REPORTS VIA THE MOD.GOV APPLICATION ON YOUR TABLET BEFORE ATTENDING THE MEETING****

Agenda Part I

Item	Page
<p>1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Members are required to notify any substitutions by midday on the day of the meeting.</p> <p>Late substitutions will not be accepted and Members attending as a substitute without having given the due notice will not be able to take part in the meeting.</p>	
<p>2. MINUTES - 3 MARCH 2021 To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3rd March 2021.</p>	<p>(Pages 5 - 8)</p>
<p>3. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS Members should notify the Chair of other business which they wish to be discussed at the end of either Part I or Part II business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency.</p> <p>The Chair will decide whether any item(s) raised will be considered.</p>	
<p>4. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.</p>	
<p>5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION To receive petitions, comments and questions from the public.</p>	
<p>6. STANDARDS MATTERS REPORT REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER</p> <p>The report updates Members of the Committee on standards issues locally and nationally.</p>	<p>(Pages 9 - 16)</p>

7. REVIEW OF COUNCILLOR COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

(Pages
17 - 72)

The report covers the review of the Councillor Complaints Handling Procedure. This was undertaken following the adoption of the new Code of Conduct by full Council this year. It seeks to improve the Procedure by taking into account complaints received since the Procedure was last reviewed in May 2019. The proposed amendments are set out under 8.1 of this report.

Agenda Item 2

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, 3RD MARCH, 2021 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Judi Billing MBE (Chair), Ruth Brown (Vice-Chair), Kate Aspinwall, Clare Billing, David Levett, Sean Prendergast, Martin Stears-Handscomb, Claire Strong and Richard Thake.*

Parish Councillor Martin Griffin

Nicholas Moss OBE (Independent Person), Peter Chapman and John Richardson (Reserve Independent Persons), non-voting advisory roles

In Attendance: *Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community), Isabelle Alajooz (Legal Commercial Team Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Nurainatta Katevu (Legal Regulatory Team Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer) and Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)*

7 WELCOME AND REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY

Audio recording – 23 seconds

The Chair welcomed everyone to this virtual meeting of Cabinet that was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online and advised that there was the opportunity for the public and press to listen and view proceedings.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager undertook a roll call and drew attention to the Remote/Partly Remote Meetings Protocol Summary which gave advice regarding the following:

- Attendance;
- Live Streaming;
- Noise interference;
- Rules of Debate; and
- Voting.

The Chair, Councillor Judi Billing, started the meeting proper.

8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 48 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sam Collins.

9 MINUTES - 22 OCTOBER 2019 TO 20 OCTOBER 2020

Audio Recording – 3 minutes 7 seconds

Councillor Judi Billing proposed, Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and it was

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 22 October 2019 and 20 October 2020 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.
- (2) That, with the authorisation of the Chair, her electronic signature and initials be attached to the Minutes approved in (1) above.

10 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 22 seconds

There was no other business notified.

11 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 32 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council policy, this meeting was being audio recorded as well as filmed. The audio recordings would be available to view on Mod.gov and the film recording via the NHDC YouTube channel.
- (2) Members were reminded to make declarations of interest before an item, the detailed reminder about this and speaking rights was set out under Chair's Announcements on the agenda.

12 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 6 minutes 6 seconds

There were no presentations by members of the public.

13 STANDARDS MATTERS REPORT

Audio recording – 6 minutes 14 seconds

The Service Director – Legal and Community/Monitoring Officer presented the report entitled Standards Matters.

She advised that, in respect of Paragraph 8.5 of the report, further complaints had been received since publication of the report.

Councillor Clare Billing proposed, Councillor Richard Thake seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the report entitled Standards Matters be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure good governance within the Council.

14 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION ('LGA') MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

Audio recording – 9 minutes 28 seconds

The Service Director – Legal and Community/Monitoring Officer presented the report entitled Local Government Association Model Code of Conduct together with the following appendices:

- Appendix 1 – LGA model code 19 January 2021;
- Appendix 2 – suggested replacement Appendix B Table 1, which includes the NHDC definition of DPIs and links to guidance/ statutory instrument (and some typographical changes);
- Appendix 3 – suggested replacement Appendix C, which includes the NHDC Appendix C on Dispensations.

She advised that:

- This was not a perfect Code, but on balance as a package with LGA guidance and support it should be considered, but it was for this Committee to consider whether to recommend adoption to Council;
- The Model Code had received a mixed reaction across the Country, which was for a variety of reasons: from style of code/ what it covered/ elections about to take place to the fact that there were no effective sanctions – so why bother;
- Locally, however, there had been in-principle support for local councils to adopt (24 of the 27 in the District had indicated they were interested in taking this forward)
- If the Model Code was not adopted, the current NHDC Code and guidance would require review with associated resources;

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor Richard Thake;
- Councillor Ruth Brown;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Independent Person Nicholas Moss;
- Councillor Clare Billing;
- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Parish Councillor Martin Griffin;
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn;
- Reserve Independent Person John Richardson;
- Reserve Independent Person Peter Chapman.

In response to questions the Service Director Legal and Community/Monitoring Officer advised:

- That if the Model Code were adopted and it was reviewed by the LGA, a report would be brought to this Committee to consider (and whether to recommend adopting the revised version);
- Any amendments to the current version would need to be considered and adopted by Council;

- If the best practice list was included, Member could not be held accountable for anything in this list and it did not particularly add to that Code;
- It was suggested that Appendix B of the Code - Table 1 be replaced with Appendix B and Appendix C of the Code – List of Best Practices be replaced with Appendix C;
- If training is deemed as mandatory then options and methods of training would be considered – although a pragmatic and proactive approach would be undertaken by officers.

Members considered that the best practice list and new Appendix C should be included with the Model Code.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

- (1) That the LGA Model Code of Conduct be adopted with the following amendments:
 - (i) Appendix B to include the replacement Table 1, which includes the NHDC definition of DPIs and links to guidance/ statutory instrument
 - (ii) Replacement of the Appendix C good practice recommendations with Appendix C grounds for a Dispensation
 - (iii) Definition of 'room' to include a footnote explanation that this includes 'virtual meeting' room and typographical changes to use the words: 'Registrable' and 'behaviours';
- (2) That the Code take effect from the day after the election poll in 2021 (7 May) or such day if the election is postponed, as the case may be;
- (3) That training on the new code be compulsory for all District Councillors during the 2021-2022 municipal year.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure good governance within the Council, which is reflective of a national governance model.

The meeting closed at 8.22 pm

Chair

TITLE OF REPORT: STANDARDS MATTERS REPORT

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR: LEGAL & COMMUNITY / MONITORING OFFICER

COUNCIL PRIORITY: BE A MORE WELCOMING, INCLUSIVE AND EFFICIENT COUNCIL

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The report updates Members of the Committee on standards issues locally and nationally.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That the Committee notes the content of the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 To ensure good governance within the Council.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 None.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 Group Leaders and the Standards Committee Chair and Vice Chair are kept informed of Monitoring Officer and standards matters on a monthly basis during briefing sessions. The Monitoring Officer also holds quarterly meetings with the Independent Person, Reserve Independent Persons ('IPs') and the Chair and Vice Chair of Committee.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on an Executive key decision and has therefore not been 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 matters that relate to, or assist with, areas of Member conduct.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

NHDC

North Hertfordshire complaints/ issues update

8.1 The Committee will be aware that it is informed of the numbers of complaint/ summary and outcomes bi-annually. This has been a year of increasing complaint – as at the date of finalising the report we are now at **41**, which compares with *6 in 2020* and *18 in 2019*. The vast majority of these are/ have been formal complaints, which increases the resource implications. As per normal practice a summary of the *formal* complaints are provided (not informal ones). This does not cover the continuing volume of emails / correspondence received in relation to one of the local Councils below, which is a burden in terms of resources. The complaints are as follows:

Complaint about: Parish/ Town or District Councillor	Summary of complaint	Action <i>NB Independent Person involved in all stages of these complaints.</i>
3/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Ongoing.	Referred for investigation following unsuccessful informal action (mediation).
5/2021 complaint against 3 District Councillors	Complaint about canvassing campaign during lockdown as alleged to be against government guidelines	No case to answer as no breach of Govt. guidelines.
6/2021 allegation relating to planning application and homeless shelter	Planning decision related.	No case on that complaint as to do with decision and avenues to pursue should the complainant wish to (3C's / LGO or Judicial Review).
7/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Linked to 3/2021, that this complaint bullying and intimidatory, to confer an advantage or disadvantage and issues with GDPR.	No case to answer as this complaint was with reference to the complaint 3/2021.
8/2021 complaint against District Councillor	Treatment by a Cllr in the zoom surgery – alleged racism	Informal action recommended - training on unconscious bias & this undertaken.
9/2021 complaint against District Councillor	Treatment by a Cllr in the zoom surgery – alleged racism	No case to answer.
10/2021 complaint against 3 District Councillors (10-17 & 19 similar complaints, different complainants).	Planning permission approval for Homeless Shelter & treatment of person making representations. Also previous comments made by one of the Councillors against another District Councillor in October 2020.	No case to answer, potentially related to a service, policy or Council decision, also considered under other criteria and not upheld against all Councillors.

	Further complaint then raised against one of the Cllrs regarding an interest and alleged failure to declare.	The further complaint issue did not merit further investigation, as there was no relevant (Disclosable or Declarable) interest to declare in respect of the application.
11/2021 complaint against 3 District Councillors	Planning permission approval for Homeless Shelter & treatment of person making representations.	No case to answer, potentially related to a service, policy or Council decision, also considered under other criteria and not upheld against all Councillors.
12/2021 complaint against 3 District Councillors	Planning permission approval for Homeless Shelter & treatment of person making representations.	No case to answer, potentially related to a service, policy or Council decision, also considered under other criteria and not upheld against all Councillors.
13/2021 complaint against 3 District Councillors	Planning permission approval for Homeless Shelter and the way the complainant was treated when they made their representations.	No case to answer, potentially related to a service, policy or Council decision, also considered under other criteria and not upheld against all Councillors.
14/2021 complaint against 3 District Councillors	Planning permission approval for Homeless Shelter & treatment of person making representations.	No case to answer, potentially related to a service, policy or Council decision, also considered under other criteria and not upheld against all Councillors.
15/2021 complaint against 3 District Councillors	Planning permission approval for Homeless Shelter & treatment of person making representations.	No case to answer, potentially related to a service, policy or Council decision, also considered under other criteria and not upheld against all Councillors.
16/2021 complaint against 3 District Councillors	Planning permission approval for Homeless Shelter & treatment of person making representations.	No case to answer, potentially related to a service, policy or Council decision, also considered under other criteria and not

		upheld against all Councillors.
17/2021 complaint against 3 District Councillors	Planning permission approval for Homeless Shelter, no specific Councillors listed – all Councillors/ decision.	As this appeared to be unnamed Councillors/ or Cllrs as a whole on the Committee, this related to a Council decision and therefore no case to answer under the Councillor complaints handling.
18/2021 complaint against District Councillor.	Reg of Interest - Company Information Request – alleged that the Councillor should have declared an interest on Register.	Person cited from companies house was not the District Councillor. This did bring to light another interest not registered – the Councillor informed that this should be put on the Register, this was updated and otherwise no case to answer.
19/2021 complaint against 2 District Councillors	Planning permission approval for Homeless Shelter & treatment of person making representations.	No case to answer, potentially related to a service, policy or Council decision, also considered under other criteria and not upheld against all Councillors.
20/2021 complaint against Sandon Parish Councillor	Use of social media	Councillor no longer a Cllr so complaint suspended under Procedure for up to 14 months, in the event returns as a Parish Councillor and would then be reassessed if relevant.
21/2021 complaint against a Knebworth Parish Councillor.	In relation to the Councillors private property.	Councillor not acting as a Councillor / or Parish Council business, so no case to answer.
22/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Various allegations, including alleged behaviour at a meeting in December 2020 and data protection allegations against GACC.	Does not merit further action as relates to earlier one 3/2021 and 7/2021. Data disputes with the Council do not fall under the Code.
23/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Decision of July to enact a decision from December 2020 meeting. Alleged false statements in relation to this and other meetings, alleged bullying and harassment.	Related to / linked to 3/2021.

24/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Decision of July to enact a decision from December 2020 meeting. Alleged false statements in relation to this and other meetings, alleged bullying and harassment.	Related to / linked to 3/2021.
25/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Decision of July to enact a decision from December 2020 meeting. Alleged false statements in relation to this and other meetings, alleged bullying and harassment.	Related to / linked to 3/2021.
26/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Decision of July to enact a decision from December 2020 meeting. Alleged false statements in relation to this and other meetings, alleged bullying and harassment.	Related to / linked to 3/2021.
27/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Ongoing.	
28/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Allegations dating back to June 2020 & December 2020.	Person was not a Cllr at the time of the behaviour therefore no case to answer.
29/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Conduct in a meeting in December 2020.	Relates to / in response to complaints 3/2021 & 7/2021 decisions as above, therefore no further action.
30/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Various allegations.	Person no longer a Councillor therefore no case to answer.
31/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Behaviour May 2019, on alleged conflicts, emails to a political party; June 2020 and July 2020 meetings failure to treat with respect.	Historic complaint – previous complaints made in 2019/ others also. Same or similar complaints and out of time in any event, no case to answer.
32/2021 complaint against a District Councillor.	Ongoing.	
33/2021 complaint against Sandon Parish Councillor	Ongoing.	
34/2021 complaint against a District Councillor	Ongoing.	
35/2021 complaint against Sandon Parish Councillor	Ongoing.	
36/2021 complaint against Sandon Parish Councillor	Ongoing.	

37/2021 complaint against Sandon Parish Councillor	Ongoing.	
38/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Ongoing.	
39/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Ongoing.	
40/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Ongoing.	
41/2021 complaint against a Great Ashby Community Councillor.	Ongoing.	

Member training

- 8.2 Training was provided following the election as part of the new Code of Conduct requirements through an external trainer – Paul Hoey (from Hoey Ainscough Associates), in 2 sessions to District Councillors and one to local Councillors. The training is also available internally for District Councillors via the Council’s YouTube account. The training is compulsory for District Councillors, as per the full Council decision of April 2021. As at the date of finalising this report, 5 District Councillors have not undertaken this training; this has been raised with the Councillors concerned and their relevant Group Leaders.
- 8.3 In respect of the local training – the Committee should be made aware that this was offered to all local councils in the District that had adopted the LGA mode or the NHC version of this (free of charge). Despite a large number of emails to the local councils and reminders, a low number signed up for this training in September with only 18 of in excess of 200 Councillors attending.

National standards matters

- 8.4 The Committee in Standards in Public Life has continued its investigations in to ethical standards. Most recently The Committee on Standards in Public Life published its Regulating Elections Finance: report in July 2021. This report is the Government’s response to the Committee’s review. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-regulating-election-finance>. CSPL’s statement: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/lord-evans-statement-on-the-governments-response-to-the-committees-regulating-election-finance-report>
- 8.5 The Committee has also now published its consultation comments (from March) on the Cabinet Office consultation on transforming public procurement, highlighting their concerns over principles, transparency and the limited tendering undertaken by central government: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cspl-submission-to-cabinet-office-consultation-on-public-procurement?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_source=1e15e039-5eb6-437b-8fc3-25720765d787&utm_content=daily

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The terms of reference of the Standards Committee include, at paragraph 7.5.1 of their terms of reference “to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co- Opted Members of the authority”.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no capital or revenue implications arising from the content of this report.

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 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. There are no direct equalities implications from this report.
- 12.2 Good governance and high ethical standards of conduct ensure that local government decisions are taken in the public interest. The review of the best practice recommendations and appropriate changes will ensure that NHDC will continue demonstrate due regard to the objectives of the Public Sector Equality duty.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and “go local” policy do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 There are no financial implications to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 None other than again highlighting the ongoing resource implications for the complaints received during 2021.

16. APPENDICES

- 15.1 None.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 16.1 Jeanette Thompson Service Director: Legal and Community (& Monitoring Officer):
Jeanette.thompson@north-herts.gov.uk ext. 4370

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 None other than those referred to/ linked above.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE 19 October 2021
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PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

AGENDA ITEM No.

7

TITLE OF REPORT: REVIEW OF COUNCILLOR COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR: LEGAL & COMMUNITY / MONITORING OFFICER

COUNCIL PRIORITY: BE A MORE WELCOMING, INCLUSIVE AND EFFICIENT COUNCIL

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report covers the review of the Councillor Complaints Handling Procedure. This was undertaken following the adoption of the new Code of Conduct by full Council this year. It seeks to improve the Procedure by taking into account complaints received since the Procedure was last reviewed in May 2019. The proposed amendments are set out under 8.1 of this report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the Standards Committee considers and adopts the updated Councillor Complaints Handling Procedure at Appendix A;

Or in the event that further amendments are required following discussion at the meeting

- 2.2. That the Standards Committee delegates to the Service Director: Legal & Community the authority to make any consequential amendments to the Procedure, in consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair of Standards Committee, Independent Person and Reserve Independent Persons.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure an updated Procedure is in place and to maintain effective arrangements within the Council.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The current Procedure could be retained; however, this would not be the most effective option.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 Consultation has taken place with the Chair, Vice Chair, Independent Person and Reserve Independent Persons on redrafts before this came to the Committee.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on an Executive key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. The Procedure was last reviewed in May 2019, following the Committee in Standards in Public Life ('CSPL') Best Practice Recommendations and the Standards Committee's consideration and recommendation¹.
- 7.2. Since that time there have been a number of complaints, and the Council has adopted a new Code as from May 2021. It was indicated in the report to Full Council in July 2021 that a review of the Procedure would therefore be undertaken.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1. The issues addressed as part of the review:

- **Encouragement to seek local resolution at local council level (1.2, 5.2-5.3 & flowchart App 1)** – in particular, where this relates to a local (Parish/ Town or Community Council) to encourage these issues to be dealt with at a local level. This is for a number of reasons: firstly Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils are looking to adopt a protocol on this. Whilst legally² a principal Council such as North Herts, must have arrangements to deal with local Councillor complaints, that does not mean this cannot be resolved locally in the first instance, providing there is still the ability to make a complaint if this fails (albeit that account will be taken of any measures introduced and willingness to participate in that process). Timing – this is likely to be dealt with much quicker than referring this through the formal NHC complaints process.
- **Setting out what information needs to be provided with a complaint (3.1).**
- **Stages (1-6) – including 1 which provides a clearer initial preliminary filter stage (see Appendix 1).** This is for various situations, for example where: the person was not acting as a Councillor; there is clearly no potential breach of the relevant Code; as the person is no longer a Councillor; this is a repeat of a previous or similar complaint/ retaliatory complaint. These will be considered in the first instance by the MO or DMO with the Independent Person, without notification of the complaint to the Councillor concerned. This is to continue to meet the CSPL best practice recommendation 6 of having a public interest test – as it is not in the public interest to deal with matters that cannot or should not be considered or investigated (as this increases resource issues on the Council, local Councils and Councillors unnecessarily in those circumstances).
- **Combining the Appendix 1 flowchart with the Complaints Handling criteria:** to prevent confusion/ inconsistencies between the written document and flowchart.
- **Removal of duplicating references in the Procedure (on anonymous complaints – previous 6.6)**
- Minor changes have been made to refer to Councillors throughout the document and reference to North Herts Council (NHC) to conform to the updated logo and wording to assist with the flow of the document.

- 8.2. The version Appended at A to this report is the '**clean**' version – and tracking is not shown. Appendix B shows the potential changes that have been made as tracked changes. The current version is not attached, however can be accessed through this link [[Councillor Complaints Handling Procedure May 2019](#)].

¹ Standards Committee 19 February 2019, item 18

² Under section 28(6) Localism Act 2011 & R (On the Application Of Harvey) v Ledbury Town Council & Anor [2018] EWHC 1151 <https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2018/1151.html>

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Standards Committee has a function under section 7.5.11 to review and approve the Council's arrangements for dealing with complaints about Member conduct (subject to: minor amendments delegated to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person). The Service Director also has the following delegation under section 14.6.8(a) (v), namely: "To authorise changes to the Governance Policies/ Protocols/ Codes or Guidance (as the case may be) that fall within the remit of the Monitoring Officer and/ or Legal Services (and are not already covered by 14.6.9 to reflect decisions of the Council / Committees and the Cabinet, or minor ones relating to changes of fact and law, or if required for practical purposes, in order to ensure the proper administration of the Council, subject to regular notification to all Members of such changes."
- 9.2 Under s28(6) of the Localism Act 2011, a relevant authority must have arrangements in place under which allegations against Councillors can be considered.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no capital or revenue implications arising from the content of this report at this stage. Complaints are dealt with by the Monitoring Officer and Deputies by and large with some referrals externally should the Procedure indicate that this is appropriate or because of resource implication within the Directorate in dealing with this in-house.

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 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. There are no direct equalities implications from this report.
- 12.2 Good governance and high ethical standards of conduct ensure that local government decisions are taken in the public interest.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and "go local" policy do not apply to this report, as this is not a procurement or contract.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 There are no environmental implications to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 The work outlined within the report is within the caseload of the Monitoring Officer and the legal team. Implications are otherwise touched on under financial implications above.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A Complaints Handling Procedure (as amended) 'clean' version;

Appendix B Complaints Handling Procedure (as amended) with potential changes tracked.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

17.1 Jeanette Thompson Service Director: Legal and Community (& Monitoring Officer):
Jeanette.thompson@north-herts.gov.uk ext. 4370

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None other than those referred to/ linked to in the report or associated documents.

Complaints Handling Procedure for matters relating to the Councillors' Code of Conduct

1. Introduction

- 1.1 These Procedures are “arrangements” and set out how a formal complaint against a Councillor can be made and will be handled. This covers complaints that an elected or co-opted Councillor of NHC (*or of a Parish/ Town or Community Council within the North Hertfordshire area*) has failed to comply with that authority's Councillors' Code of Conduct. This does not cover complaints against NHC or local Councils as a whole, nor employees of such Councils. Note that in respect of the latter, NHC has no legal remit to consider such complaints.
- 1.2 Under Section 28(6) and (7) of the Localism Act 2011, the Council must have in place “arrangements” under which allegations that a Councillor or co-opted Councillor of NHC (*or of a Parish/ Town or Community Council within the authority's area*), who are acting or appear to be acting as a Councillor, has failed to comply with the applicable Councillor's Code of Conduct, so that they can be, considered, investigated if appropriate and decisions made on such allegations. Any complaint will be assessed against the criteria set out in the flow chart under **Stage 1** and **Stage 2** (Appendix 1), and where this is a complaint against a local Councillor (Parish, Town or Community Councillor) *you are strongly encouraged to resolve this locally in the first instance.*

2. The Code of Conduct

- 2.1 NHC has adopted a Code of Conduct for Councillors, which can be found in Section 17 of the Council's Constitution [[CLICK HERE](#)]. .
- 2.2 Each Parish / Town or Community Council is also required to adopt a Code of Conduct. These should be available on the Parish / Town or Community Council's website and/or by request to the relevant council's Parish Clerk.

3. Making a complaint

- 3.1 If you wish to make a complaint, the '[Complaining about a Councillor](#)' page provides details as to how you can do so and what information you should provide. ***Please note that the complaint must relate to a Councillor's role, they should still be a Councillor and this is not the correct process to use if you are unhappy with a Council decision (which would, at District level, be the [Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy](#). At Town, Parish and Community Council would be their local policy).***

The information you should provide in the complaint is:



- 3.1.1 which Councillor you are complaining about and the name of the Council of which they are a member;
- 3.1.2 their alleged misconduct and dates; and
- 3.1.3 how you consider their alleged misconduct breaches the relevant authority's Councillor Code of Conduct.

*PLEASE NOTE that, while you may disapprove of the way you believe a Councillor has acted, there are a number of issues that would preclude further action, as set out in **Stages 1-2** as it will not be in the public interests to pursue some complaints that the Council cannot legally or should not deal with – see APPENDIX 1.*

Complaints can be made by eform:

[Making a complaint about a Councillor](#)

Or in writing to:

The Monitoring Officer, North Hertfordshire District Council, District Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City SG6 3JF

- 3.2 The Monitoring Officer is a senior NHC officer responsible for overseeing the administration of the Council's complaints handling arrangements against District and local Councillors. Under this Procedure, however, reference to the Monitoring Officer during the assessment or investigation is deemed to include a Deputy Monitoring Officer, including an external one who may undertake any of the steps set out in this process. Complaints may be referred to an external Deputy Monitoring Officer to consider if further action is warranted. Circumstances in which a referral to an external Deputy Monitoring Officer or Investigator might arise include when:
 - 3.2.1 The complaint comes from a senior officer of the Council, such as the Managing Director, Chief Finance Officer or the Monitoring Officer and it would be inappropriate for the Monitoring Officer or an internal Deputy to investigate.
 - 3.2.2 The complaint is about a high-profile Councillor such as the Leader, or an Executive Member of NHC and it would be inappropriate for the Monitoring Officer or an internal Deputy to investigate.
- 3.3 There are other complaints that the Monitoring Officer considers would not be appropriate for them to investigate. Once a complaint with the information detailed under 3.1 has been received by NHC, the matter will be considered to be a formal complaint.



- 3.4 A complainant will need to provide their name and a contact address, preferably also with an email address and telephone number, so that NHC can acknowledge receipt of the complaint and keep a complainant informed of its progress. It is possible to keep a complainant's name and locality confidential, if this is requested, although it is likely to hamper and, ultimately, prevent any effective assessment or investigation. It is also in the interests of transparency and fairness, that a Councillor accused of misconduct, generally has a right to know who has made the allegations. A complainant can ask for their name and contact to remain confidential on the complaint form, with an explanation for the request. This is only likely where the Monitoring Officer considers that this is likely to result in intimidation or violence. The Monitoring Officer will consider the request and, if granted, they will not provide the complainant's name and locality to the Councillor without the complainant's prior consent. Exceptions to this will be if this is referred to the Police, or if other regulatory bodies (for example the auditors or external fraud investigators). In these circumstances a request for confidentiality would be a matter for those bodies to consider.
- 3.5 NHC does not normally consider/ investigate anonymous complaints, unless there is a clear public interest in doing so. In any event, NHC's ability to do would be severely limited, as it is impossible in such situations to request further information from a complainant or provide confirmation of any decision.
- 3.6 The Complaints Handling Procedure Flowchart at Appendix 1 includes the aspects of the complaint and assessment criteria that the Monitoring Officer takes into account before deciding whether to consider the complaint (**Stage 1-2**) and assess the complaint (**Stage 3**).
- 4. Who is the Independent Person?**
- 4.1 The Independent Person is a statutory office holder appointed by NHC. A description of their role is set out in Appendix 4.
- 4.2 The Procedural arrangements must include at least one appointed Independent Person. NHC has an Independent Person whose views will be sought on all formal allegations (as part of the assessment of the complaint – before any investigation), as well as seeking their views (as it legally must) at any other stage during an investigation or determination of a formal complaint. NHC also currently has two Reserve Independent Persons who can be contacted by a Councillor who is subject to a formal complaint for procedural advice, or who may be involved at other stages if the Independent Person is unable to participate. This will be set out in any formal letter to the complainant and Councillor confirming that a complaint has been received.



4.3 References to the Independent Person in this document include the Independent Person and the Reserve Independent Persons, unless otherwise stated.

5. How will my formal complaint be handled?

5.1 The complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days through the contact information provided by the complainant.

5.2 The Monitoring Officer will review every complaint received and will consult the Independent Person. The following Stages will be applied. If it is a Parish, Town, or Community Councillor complaint, then as per Appendix 1, confirmation will be sought from the complainant that they have tried to resolve this issue at local level. As a first step, the complainant will be referred to a local resolution unless this is impractical or unreasonable for either party to do so. This does not prevent a formal complaint being progressed at a later date if the first step is unsuccessful, but it encourages a quicker localised resolution (as this formal process can take in excess of 6 months from receipt of a formal complaint to conclude).

5.3 Where a Parish, Town, or Community Councillor complaint cannot be resolved locally or where it relates to a NHC Councillor, the tests under Appendix 1 (**Stage 1-2**) will be considered and at **Stage 3** an assessment decisions taken, which can be one of the following:

5.3.1 no further action;

5.3.2 informal action (including mediation or training or suggested apology);

5.3.3 further investigation;

5.3.4 referral to the Standards Sub-Committee.

The Monitoring Officer does not have to take the steps in 5.3.1 to 5.3.4 in the order in which they are listed.

5.4 This assessment decision will normally be taken within 28 working days of receipt of the formal complaint and considered in accordance with the Assessment Criteria in Appendix 1.

5.5 Where the Monitoring Officer requires additional information in order to come to a decision, they will request this information.

5.6 Where the complaint has moved to **Stage 2**, a copy of the complaint and any relevant documentation will be forwarded to the Councillor for consideration and comment. The Councillor will be given 14 days to respond unless there are reasons to extend this deadline, for example for holidays, sick leave, a criminal or a whistleblowing investigation. The Councillor is expected to co-operate with



- Monitoring Officer and not to attempt to interfere with impede/obstruct any part of the process, or intimidate any person involved in this process. Failure to co-operate can be a breach of the Code, in addition to the original complaint.
- 5.7 If the complaint relates to a Parish/ Town or Community Councillor, see 5.2 above; and is then considered under **Stages 1-2**, the Monitoring Officer may also seek the views of the relevant Clerk, in confidence, before coming to an assessment decision under **Stage 3**. Such views would again be expected within 14 days (unless there are reasons to extend the deadline on grounds such as those at 5.6 above).
- 5.8 Once the Councillor's response (and any Clerk's response) has been received and/or the deadline has expired for such comments and none has been forthcoming, the Monitoring Officer will consult the Independent Person. This consultation may result in the request for further information from any relevant party, and further consultation will take place. Following this the Monitoring Officer will make one of the assessment decisions set out under 5.3. above (**Stage 3**).
- 5.9 When the Monitoring Officer has taken a decision, they will inform the complainant and the Councillor (and in cases involving a Parish/ Town or Community Councillor) the Clerk (or Chairman as may be appropriate) of the decision and the reasons for that decision. These will remain confidential.
- 5.10 Complainants should note that this will be the assessment decision of whether there appears to be a case to answer and whether to investigate, or consider alternative action. Further action will require a complainant's co-operation during the investigation and, if necessary, any hearing, which is likely to be held in public. The complainant would be required to attend such a hearing and provide their evidence/ and or answer questions relating to the complaint.
- 5.11 Where the Monitoring Officer seek to resolve the complaint informally, without the need for a formal investigation (as per 5.3.2) they will consult the Independent Person on such action. Informal resolution may involve the Councillor agreeing that their conduct was unacceptable and offering an apology, or other remedial action. Where the Councillor makes a reasonable offer of informal resolution, but the complainant is not willing to accept the offer, the Monitoring Officer will take account of this in deciding whether the complaint merits any further action. Equally, if a Councillor refuses to engage with such an informal approach (for example by not apologising, or attending training), the Monitoring Officer may reconsider the decision and decide whether to refer the complaint for investigation, or directly to the Standards Sub-Committee for the original complaint and (and failure to co-operate) to be determined.



- 5.12 If the complaint identifies potential criminal conduct or breach of other regulation, the Monitoring Officer is likely to refer it to the Police or other regulatory agencies. If the complaint relates to an alleged Disclosable Pecuniary Interest offence¹, it will be dealt with under an agreed Protocol with Hertfordshire Constabulary, and the Police (and finally the Director of Public Prosecutions) will be the relevant body that determines whether further action should be taken on such a complaint. The Council cannot influence any decisions taken by the Police or other regulatory body, would have no role in their decision, and would not wish to prejudice such bodies' consideration or enquiries other than to co-operate with them. **Please note** that where a complainant wishes to withdraw the complaint the Monitoring Officer is unlikely to take further action on the matter, with the exception of a referral to Police/ regulatory body - where a withdrawal of a complaint would be for them to consider. If the complainant wishes to withdraw the complaint during the investigation, then this will be considered by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person as to whether the investigation will continue. The decision to terminate an investigation will, for example, depend on the nature of the allegations and the parties involved.
- 5.13 Similarly, if the Councillor resigns or is not re-elected during this assessment or a later stage of the Complaints Handling Procedure, the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person may decide to terminate *or suspend* any further steps for up to 14 months from the date on which they cease to be a Councillor. This is because the Complaints Handling Procedure only applies to elected and co-opted Councillors. Further action *may be taken* on the complaint during that 14-month period if the Councillor is re-elected / or is co-opted back to the Council during that period. This decision will be taken by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person. If the Councillor is not re-elected/co-opted during that period, further action on the complaint will automatically cease.
- 5.14 If a Councillor has been subject to a finding of the Standards Sub-Committee and sanctions have been imposed under 9.1. or by Council and the Councillor has failed, without reasonable excuse, to comply with a sanction, then the Monitoring Officer will refer this directly back to the Standards Sub-Committee ('direct referral') for determination.
- 5.15 There is no further right of internal review or appeal by a complainant following a decision on the preliminary assessment not to investigate (unless new evidence is then submitted and this will, in any event, be subject to the Assessment Criteria in Appendix 1). Brief and anonymised versions of the complaints and any outcomes are reported through to the Standards Committee and Full Council.

¹ Under s34 Localism Act 2011



6. How is the investigation conducted?

- 6.1. The Council has adopted a procedure for the investigation of conduct complaints, which is attached as Appendix 2 to these arrangements.
- 6.2. If the Monitoring Officer decides that a complaint merits investigation, they may appoint an Investigating Officer, who may be a Deputy Monitoring Officer, another senior NHC officer, an officer of another authority or an external investigator. This Officer's purpose is to conduct an objective investigation on the merits of the complaint and whether there appears to be a case to answer that will be presented to the Standards Sub-Committee. The Officer is not there to represent the complainant or the Councillor and there is no difference in the status of the report prepared by an Investigating Officer and that of the Monitoring Officer.
- 6.3. Any investigation should be completed within 4 months, and parties must co-operate to ensure that this deadline can be met (unless there are extenuating circumstances to justify extending this). Any failure by the Councillor complained of to co-operate, or attempt to interfere with impede OR obstruct any part of the process, or any person involved in the process, may, as previously indicated, be considered a separate potential breach of the Code of Conduct, notwithstanding the original complaint. Equally should a complainant attempt to interfere with impede/obstruct any part of the process, or intimidate any person involved in the process, the Monitoring Officer reserves the right to terminate the investigation. Any such decision will be taken in consultation with the Independent Person.
- 6.4. The Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer will decide whether they need to interview a complainant to understand the nature of the complaint, any events surrounding it and consider what documents need to be seen, and any other party who needs to be interviewed. Such interviews may be by telephone or in person and are likely to be recorded and that record used/ produced as part of the witness evidence, together with any other relevant evidence that has been produced. If any witness(es) to the alleged breaches of the Code have been identified, the Monitoring Officer/ Investigating Officer will decide whether to interview those witnesses. Again, these interview arrangements may be by telephone or in person and will be recorded/ used as part of witness evidence. This is to prevent disagreements as to what has or has not been said at interview. Any witnesses must be identified by the complainant at this stage of the Procedure, as late witnesses will generally not be accepted after the investigation has been concluded.
- 6.5. The Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer will provide the Councillor with a copy of the complaint, and ask the Councillor to provide their explanation of events, and to identify what documents they need to see and the name(s) of anyone witnesses the believe should be interviewed. The Councillor and any of their



- witnesses relevant to the alleged breaches, are likely to be interviewed on the same basis as under 6.4. Any witnesses must be identified at this stage of the Procedure as late witnesses will generally not be accepted after the investigation has been concluded. The Councillor is expected to co-operate with any investigation.
- 6.6 At the end of their investigation, the Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer will produce a draft report (“the Investigation Report”) and will send copies of that draft report, in confidence, to the complainant, to the Councillor concerned and to the Monitoring Officer where they were not the investigating officer, so that there is an opportunity to identify any inaccuracies and any matter in that draft report of dispute or which the parties believe require more consideration. The Independent Person will also see a copy of the report for comment. Relevant parties will be given 21 days to respond. The complainant / Councillor will be expected to raise issues with the draft report at this stage.
- 6.7 Equally, parties are encouraged to acknowledge or accept any findings at the draft report stage, so that the issues can be narrowed to those that remain in dispute. It is possible that parties will disagree with the findings / reasons on whether there is a case to answer in the report. Comments and issues will be considered by the Monitoring Officer/ Investigating Officer; errors will be corrected; however, this does not mean the report findings will be changed. A summary of these comments from the complainant/ Councillor are likely to be included in the final report.
- 6.8 Having received and considered any comments made on the draft Investigation Report, it will then be finalised. Where an Investigating Officer has been appointed, the Investigating Officer will send their final report (again in confidence) to the complainant, the Councillor and to the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person. Note that this report will remain confidential until the Monitoring Officer determines otherwise or in any hearing, the Standards Sub-Committee determines that this matter shall be heard in public².
- 6.9 Where an Investigating Officer has been appointed and if the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person are not satisfied that the investigation has covered the issues sufficiently the Monitoring Officer may ask the Investigating Officer to reconsider their draft report. The Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person, will review any revised report and may decide that there remains no case to answer or further action is required, as set out below.
- 7. What happens if the Investigating Officer, or Monitoring Officer, concludes that there is no evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct?**

² In accordance with Data Protection Act/ GDPR principles and exemptions and any requirements under the Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12A.



7.1 Where an Investigating Officer has been appointed by the Monitoring Officer to conduct an investigation, the Monitoring Officer will review the Investigating Officer's report in consultation with the Independent Person. If the Monitoring Officer is satisfied that the Investigating Officer's report is sufficient and there is no apparent case to answer of a failure to comply with the Code, the Monitoring Officer will write to the parties (*and to the Clerk, if the complaint relates to a Parish/Town or Community Councillor, or Chairman as may be appropriate*), to notify them that they are satisfied that no further action is required. The report shall remain confidential and other than those parties who have received a report, shall not be disclosed further. An anonymised summary of the complaint and outcome will, however, be reported through to Standards Committee and Full Council during the year.

8. What happens if the Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer concludes in the report that there is evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct?

8.1. If the Monitoring Officer is satisfied that the Investigating Officer's report is sufficient and there is an apparent case to answer of a failure to comply with the Code, the Monitoring Officer will write to the parties (*and to the Clerk, if the complaint relates to a Parish/Town or Community Councillor, or Chairman as may be appropriate*), to notify them that the matter will proceed to a hearing before the Standards Sub-Committee or, in consultation with the Independent Person, that the scope for an Alternative remedy will be considered.

Alternative remedy

8.2. The Monitoring Officer may consider that the matter can reasonably be resolved without the need for a hearing. In such a case, they will consult the Independent Person and the complainant and seek to agree a fair resolution which also helps to ensure higher standards of conduct for the future. Such resolution may include the Councillor acknowledging that their conduct was unacceptable and offering an apology, and/or other remedial action (such as training or mediation). If the Councillor complies with the suggested resolution, the Monitoring Officer will report the matter to the Standards Committee (*and the Parish Council*) for information, but will take no further action. If the Councillor fails to abide by the Alternative remedy the Monitoring Office may re-open the issue and refer the case to the Standards Sub-Committee for a hearing to determine whether there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct.

Hearings

8.3. The Councillor will be expected to attend, unless there is a reasonable excuse for not doing so – as notified to the Monitoring Officer in advance of any hearing.

- 8.4. Normal Committee rules apply as to whether the Sub-Committee meets in public or private with the presumption that any hearings will be in public in NHC offices.
- 8.5. In all but straightforward cases there will be a preliminary administrative hearing of the Standards Sub-Committee, to case-manage the preparation and arrangements for the hearing called a **Case Management Hearing** – (“**CMH**”), followed by a **Final Determination Hearing** (“**FDH**”). The Membership of those hearings may or may not be the same.

CMH

- 8.6. The CMH will deal with administrative issues, such as fixing a date for the final hearing/ length of the hearing/ final evidence or representations that may be presented at the FDH.
- 8.7. This CMH should be arranged between 35 - 42 calendar days after the report has been sent to the parties.
- 8.8. As part of the investigation, the Councillor will have been asked and should have informed the Investigating Officer of any witnesses that the Councillor wishes to rely on / and evidence obtained as part of the Investigation. However, if this has not taken place the Councillor will be expected to confirm 14 days prior to the CMH:
- 8.8.1 the areas of the Investigating Officer’s report that the Councillor disputes (and the factual reasons for doing so), including evidence from current witnesses that are relevant to the matter of dispute; and
- 8.8.2 whether they will be represented at the final hearing (and details of that representative).
- 8.9 If the Councillor fails to confirm the above information by a date specified prior to the CMH or fails to attend the hearing without reasonable explanation, then this may be considered a further potential breach of the Code of Conduct (for failure to co-operate). In the event that the Councillor fails (with or without excuse) to attend, the CMH may take place in the absence of Councillor. Where the Councillor attends they may be represented or accompanied during the hearing by a solicitor, counsel or, with the permission of the Sub-Committee, another person.
- 8.10 The Councillors of the Sub-Committee, Independent Person, Investigating Officer, Monitoring Officer, or Legal Adviser may ask questions of the Councillor and of the complainant.
- 8.11 The Sub-Committee may take legal advice from its Legal Adviser, or seek the opinion of the Independent Person at any time during the CMH and may retire to deliberate in private before it comes to a decision. The Legal Adviser will retire

with the Members of the Committee and the substance of any legal advice provided when the Sub-Committee retires, will be shared with the Member and the Investigating Officer if they are present when the Members return to the hearing. The Independent Person will not retire with the Sub-Committee. If the Sub-Committee requires the opinion of the Independent Person on CMH matters, this should be requested prior to retiring to consider the decision/ or in any event before the decision is taken. **Note:** as the CMH is an administrative hearing and not the determination of the complaint, such opinion *may* rather than *has to be* sought prior to the decision being made.

- 8.12 Other than in exceptional circumstances, the date of the FDH must be fixed at the CMH, within 35-42 calendar days of the CMH.

FDH

- 8.13 The Council has agreed a procedure for the FDH for the complaint, which is attached as Appendix 3.
- 8.14 At the FDH, the Investigating Officer or the Monitoring Officer (or nominated representative) will present their report, call such witnesses as they consider necessary and make representations to substantiate their conclusion that there is a case to answer that the Councillor has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct. The Standards Sub-Committee may set out a timetable for the hearing.
- 8.15 At the FDH, the Councillor will not be able to challenge evidence from a witness that has been contained/ reflected in the Investigation Report, unless the Councillor has indicated by the specified date prior to the CMH that a particular witness' evidence is disputed and why. Subject to that indication, the Monitoring Officer/ Investigating Officer will be expected to request the attendance of that witness at the hearing. If the Councillor has not indicated by a specified date that a witness' evidence is disputed, the Monitoring Officer is unlikely to request that witness' attendance to attend the FDH.
- 8.16 The complainant should be prepared to attend and give evidence to the Sub-Committee. The Councillor will then have an opportunity to ask any relevant questions of the Investigating Officer or witnesses produced at the hearing through the Chairman, give their evidence, call witnesses and to make representations to the Sub-Committee as to why they consider that they have not failed to comply with the Code of Conduct. The Members of the Sub-Committee, Independent Person, Investigating Officer, Monitoring Officer, or Legal Adviser may ask questions of any of the witnesses present (including the Councillor and complainant). The Chairman of the Sub-Committee has the ability to halt any questions that they believe are irrelevant, repetitive, or haranguing in nature.



- 8.17 The Sub-Committee may take legal advice from its Legal Adviser at any time during the FDH and may retire to deliberate in private before it comes to its decision. The Legal Adviser will retire with the Members of the Sub-Committee and the substance of any legal advice given to the Members in private session will be confirmed when the meeting reconvenes in public session. The Independent Person will not retire with the Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee should request the views of the Independent Person prior to retiring to consider the decision/ or in any event before the decision is taken, on whether there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct. Please note that in accordance with section 28(7) of the Localism Act 2011 the views of the Independent Person are to be sought, and taken into account, by the Sub-Committee before it makes its decision on an allegation that it has decided to investigate.
- 8.18 The Sub-Committee, with the benefit of any views from the Independent Person, may conclude that the Councillor *did not* fail to comply with the Code of Conduct, and dismiss the complaint. In these circumstances, the case is at an end.
- 8.19 If the Sub-Committee concludes that the Councillor *did* fail to comply with the Code of Conduct, the Chair will inform the Councillor of this finding and of the reasons for it. The Sub-Committee will then consider what action, if any, it should take as a result of the Councillor's failure to comply with the Code of Conduct. In doing this, the Sub-Committee will give the Councillor an opportunity to make representations to it and will seek the view of the Independent Person on any sanction, but will then decide what action, if any, to take in respect of the matter. The Sub-Committee may retire in private session to deliberate on what, if any, sanctions will be applied. The Legal Adviser will retire with the Members of the Sub-Committee and the substance of any legal advice given to the Members in private session will be confirmed when the meeting reconvenes in public session. The Independent Person will not retire with the Sub-Committee
- 9. What action can the Standards Sub-Committee take where a Councillor has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct?**
- 9.1 The Council has delegated to the Sub-Committee such of its powers to take action in respect of individual Councillors as may be necessary to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. The Sub Committee will impose sanctions (or a combination of sanctions) commensurate with the nature and gravity of the breach of the Code of Conduct and confirm their reasons for doing so. Accordingly the sanctions available to the Sub-Committee are to:-
- 9.1.1 Publish its findings in respect of the Councillor's conduct (e.g. in a local newspaper, in print or on-line or both) Any decision will be published on the Council's website in any event;



- 9.1.2 Report its findings to Council (*or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council*) for information;
 - 9.1.3 Report its findings and recommend to Council (*or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council*) that the Councillor be issued with a formal censure or be reprimanded;
 - 9.1.4 Recommend to the Councillor's Group Leader (or in the case of un-grouped Councillors, recommend to Council or to Committees) that the Councillor be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council;
 - 9.1.5 Recommend to the Leader of the Council that the Councillor be removed from the Cabinet, or removed from particular Executive Member responsibilities;
 - 9.1.6 Instruct the Monitoring Officer to arrange (or recommend that the Parish /Town / Community Council should arrange) training for the Councillor;
 - 9.1.7 Recommend to Council (*or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council*) that the Councillor be removed from all outside appointments to which they have been appointed or nominated by the authority;
 - 9.1.8 Recommend to Council (*or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council*) that it withdraws facilities provided to the Councillor by the Council, such as a computer, website and/or email;
 - 9.1.9 Recommend to Council (*or the Parish / Town/ Community Council*) that the Councillor be excluded from the Council's Offices or other premises, with the exception of meeting rooms (real or virtual) as necessary for attending Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings; or
 - 9.1.10 Take no further action.
- 9.2 The Sub-Committee has no power to suspend or disqualify the Councillor or to withdraw Councillors' basic or special responsibility allowances or any other payment made to the Councillor that they are entitled to under legislation.

What happens at the end of the hearing?

- 9.3 At the end of the hearing, the Chair will state the decision of the Standards Sub-Committee with a summary of the reasons as to whether or not the Councillor failed to comply with the Code of Conduct and, if the Councillor did fail to comply, any actions which the Sub-Committee resolves to take.
- 9.4 As soon as reasonably practicable thereafter (and in any event within 7 working days), a formal decision notice will be prepared by the Legal Adviser in consultation

with the Sub-Committee, and send a copy to the complainant, the Councillor (*and to the Parish Council or Chairman as may be appropriate*) by the Monitoring Officer, and make that decision notice available for public inspection and available on the Council's website.

- 9.5 There is no further right of internal review or appeal following the determination hearing by either the Councillor or complainant. Either party may seek independent advice and apply for Judicial Review of the decision or may consider making a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), although there is limited remit for the LGO to consider complaints and cannot revisit any decision taken .

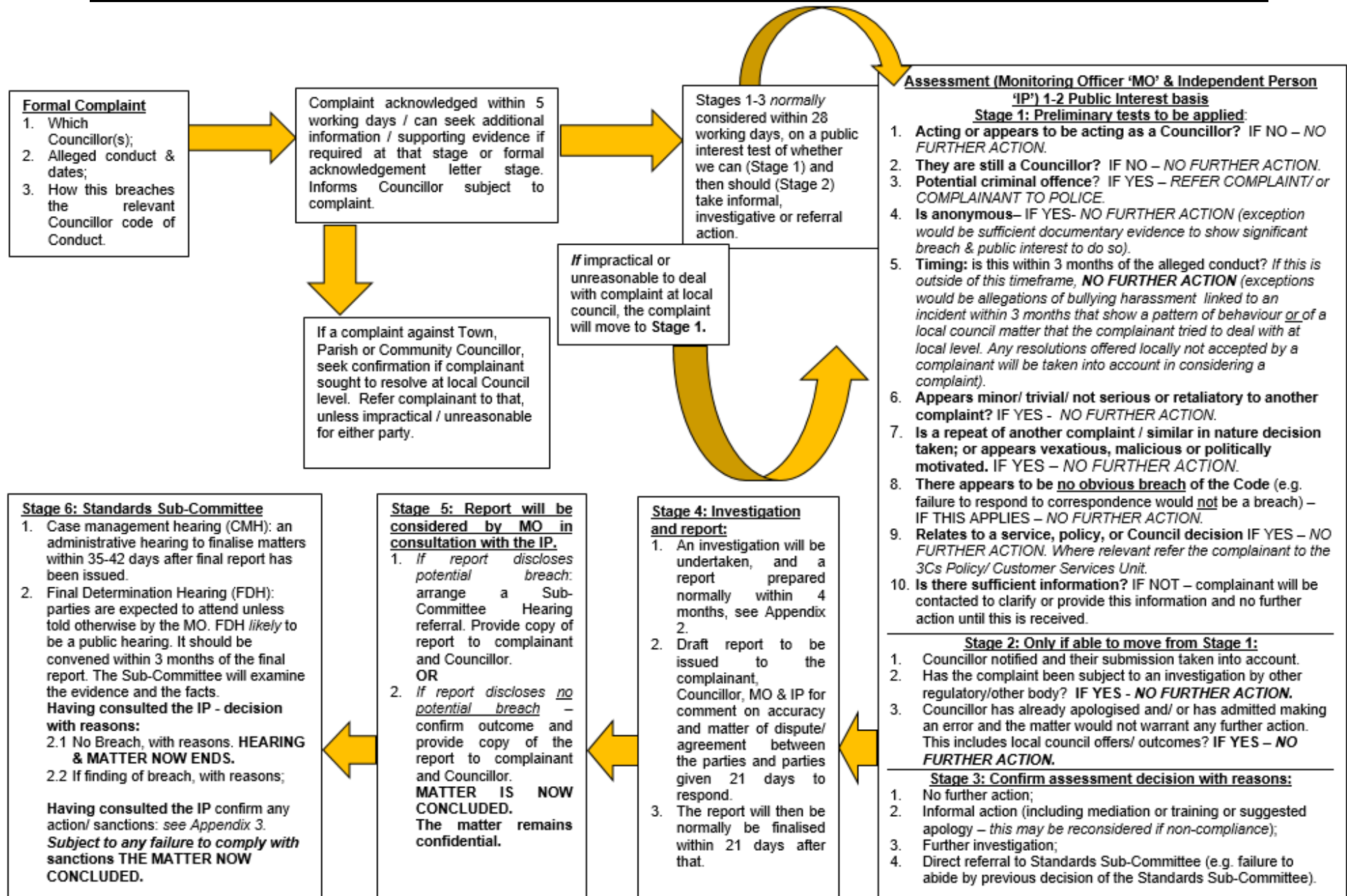
10. Revision of these arrangements

The full Standards Committee may amend these arrangements, and has delegated to a Chairman of the Sub-Committee the right to depart from these arrangements where they consider that it is expedient to do so in order to secure the effective and fair consideration of any matter. Minor amendments may be made by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person, Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards Committee under delegated authority.

- Appendix 1 Complaints Handling Procedure Flowchart & Assessment Criteria
- Appendix 2 NHC Investigation Procedure – information/ Instructions for Investigating Officer
- Appendix 3 The Final Determination Hearing (FDR) Procedure for Standards Sub-Committee
- Appendix 4 Independent Person and Reserve Independent Persons Role Description

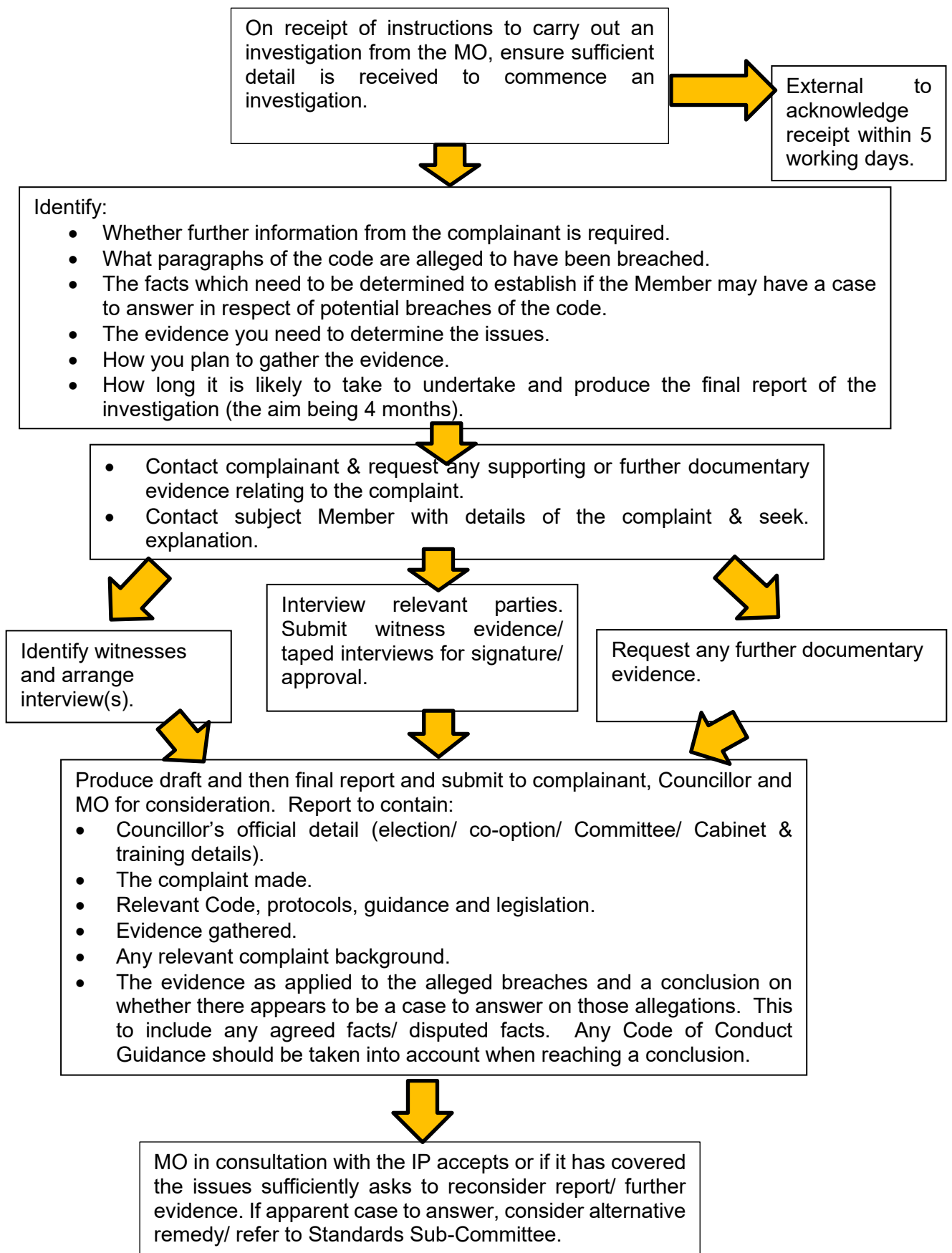
Appendix 1

Complaints Handling Procedure Flowchart & Assessment Criteria (simplified summary – full details within the Procedure)



Appendix 2

Investigation Procedure – information / instructions for Investigating Officer



Appendix 3

THE FINAL DETERMINATION HEARING (FDR) PROCEDURE FOR THE STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE

<p>The Standards Sub-Committee (“the Sub-Committee”) must have an efficient and effective hearing process. This will assist Members of the Sub-Committee to deal with all the issues that need to be resolved in a way that is fair to the Councillor subject to the allegation, any complainant and witnesses involved. This procedure sets out a consistent approach for all concerned.</p>	
1. Interpretation	
“Complainant”:	means the person who referred the allegation to Monitoring Officer.
“CMH”:	means the Sub-Committee Case Management Hearing that deals with administrative and procedural matters and clarifies the issues for the Final Determination Hearing (FDH).
“FDH”:	means Sub-Committee Final Determining Hearing that hears evidence; decides if a Councillor has breached the Code of Conduct; and, if so, the sanction to be imposed.
“Investigating Officer”:	means the Monitoring Officer, Deputy or Investigating Officer or their nominated representative(s).
“Independent Person/ IP”:	means Independent Person and Reserve Independent Persons appointed by the Council under the Localism Act 2011, whose views must be sought by the authority before it takes a decision on an allegation which it has decided to investigate under section 28(7) of the Localism Act 2011, and whose views can be sought by the authority at any other stage, or by a Councillor (<i>or a Councillor or co-opted Councillor of a Town, Parish or Community Council</i>) against whom an allegation has been made.
“Legal Adviser”:	means the officer responsible for providing legal advice to the Sub-Committee. This may be the Monitoring Officer, another legally qualified officer of the authority, or someone appointed for this purpose from outside the authority.
“Councillor”:	means the Councillor, co-opted Councillor of NHC or a Town or Parish Councillor (within the NHC area) who is the subject of the complaint.
“Proper Officer”:	means the designated Committee Services officer or nominated representative.
2. Representation	
2.1. The Councillor may be represented or accompanied during the hearing by a solicitor, counsel or, with the permission of the Sub-Committee, another person. Such person to have been notified to the Standards Sub-Committee, and agreed where applicable, at the CMH.	

<p>2.2. Where a representative has been appointed, reference below to Councillor will (except in respect of any evidence from the Councillor concerned) mean the representative.</p> <p>2.3 Where a representative is present the Councillor must indicate if the representative is to ask questions on the Councillor's behalf and make any submissions. Once such arrangements have been confirmed, they will be applied throughout the hearing.</p>
<p>3. Legal Advice</p>
<p>3.1. The Sub-Committee may take legal advice from its Legal Adviser at any time during the hearing or while they are considering the final decision on the potential breach(es) of the Code and any sanctions.</p> <p>3.2. The Legal Adviser will provide a summary of any legal advice given to the Members of the Sub-Committee in private session, when the meeting reconvenes in public session.</p>
<p>4. Voting</p>
<p>4.1 Each Member of the Sub-Committee will have one vote, and all matters/issues will be decided by a simple majority of votes cast.</p> <p>4.2 Abstentions will not be permitted. The Sub-Committee's decision will record whether it was unanimous or taken by a majority.</p>
<p>5. Quorum</p>
<p>5.1. The Proper Officer or their representative will confirm whether the Committee is quorate. A quorum for the Sub-Committee will be three elected Members of the Council.</p> <p>5.2. Where the complaint involves an allegation of misconduct against a Parish Councillor, then a non-voting Parish Member of the Standards Committee should also be present.</p> <p>5.3. The Sub-Committee must nominate a Chairman for the meeting.</p> <p>5.4. The Independent Person must be present throughout the Sub-Committee hearing.</p>
<p>6. Opening/ Setting the Scene and Preliminary Procedural Issues</p>
<p>6.1. The Members of the Sub-Committee shall determine whether the hearing will be considered in private session.</p> <p>6.2. The Chairman must explain the procedure for the hearing and remind all parties to turn off mobile phones, audible alarms, and similar devices etc. If the proceedings are in open session they will be recorded.</p> <p>6.3. The Chairman must ask all present to introduce themselves.</p>

6.4. Most if not all of the procedural/ administrative issues should have been resolved by the CMH and any Sub-Committee resolutions complied with. The Sub-Committee may, however, resolve any issues (including failure to abide by resolutions from the CMH and absence of parties/ witnesses and whether to proceed).
7. The presentation of the Complaint and evidence of the case to answer on alleged breach of the Code of Conduct
7.1. The Investigating Officer will be invited to present the report including any evidence or other material and make any representations to support the relevant conclusions on a case to answer from the report. This will be based on the complaint made to the Council and any alleged failure to co-operate with the investigation or hearing preparation (where relevant). Witnesses will be called to give evidence or have their witnesses evidence taken as accepted, where the Councillor has indicated that the witness evidence is not disputed.
7.2. The Councillor against whom the complaint has been made (or their representative) may question the Investigating Officer on the content of the report and question any witnesses called by the Investigating Officer. ³ (This is the Councillor's opportunity to ask questions arising from the report and not to make a statement).
7.3. Members of the Sub-Committee, the Independent Person and the Legal Adviser may question the Investigating Officer about the content of the report and/or any witnesses (including the complainant) called by the Investigating Officer.
8. The Councillor's case
8.1. The Councillor will then be given the opportunity to present their case (and call any relevant witnesses) including any evidence or other material and make any representations to address the specific allegations before the Sub-Committee.
8.2. The Investigating Officer may question the Councillor and/or any witnesses.
8.3. Members of the Sub-Committee, the Independent Person and the Legal Adviser may question the Councillor and/or any of the Councillor's witnesses.
9. Summing Up
9.1. The Investigating Officer will be given the opportunity to sum up the complaint and any relevant representations on the case to answer.
9.2. The Councillor, or their representative, will be given the opportunity to sum up their case.
10. Consultation with the Independent Person

³ **NOTE** If the Member disputes any relevant fact in the Investigating Officer's report, without having given prior notice of the dispute they will be required to give good reasons for not mentioning it when the draft report was finalised or in any event at the CMH. Such behaviour is likely to affect the weight of the Member's evidence on that issue and/ or be treated as evidence of failure to co-operate with an investigation.

10.1. Prior to the consultation, the Independent Person may seek a short adjournment of the hearing to prepare/ finalise their view on whether, in their view, a breach of the Code of Conduct has occurred.

10.2. The hearing will then be reconvened and Members of the Sub-Committee **must** consult the Independent Person on whether in his/ her opinion a breach has occurred. This view must be taken into account by the Sub-Committee before it makes its decision on an allegation.

11. The Members of Sub-Committee will deliberate in private session to consider evidence presented and to reach their decision (the Legal Adviser will attend)

12. Decision

12.1. Upon the Sub-Committee's return the Chairman will announce the Sub-Committee's decision in the following terms:-

12.1.1. The Sub-Committee decides that there is no breach of the Code of Conduct;
or

12.1.2. The Sub-Committee decides that there is a breach of the Code of Conduct;

12.2 The Sub-Committee will give reasons for its decision.

12.3 If the Sub-Committee decides that there is no breach of the Code of Conduct the Chairman closes the hearing. The case is at an end.

12.4 If the Sub-Committee decides that the Councillor has breached the Code of Conduct, it will consider any representations from the Investigating Officer and/or the Councillor and will seek the views of the Independent Person as to:

12.4.1 Whether any action should be taken; and

12.4.2 If so, what form any action (in the form of a sanction) should take.

12.5 As part of their role under 12.4.2, the Sub-Committee will consider whether to impose any of the following sanctions:

12.5.1 Publish its findings in respect of the Councillor's conduct (e.g. in a local newspaper in print or on-line or both). [Note that any decision will normally be made available for inspection and published on the Council's website in the event that the hearing was held in public];

12.5.2 Report its findings to Council (or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council) for information;

12.5.3 Report its findings and recommend to Council (or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council) that the Councillor be issued with a formal censure or be reprimanded;

- 12.5.4 Recommend to the Councillor's Group Leader (or in the case of un-grouped Councillors, recommend to Council or to Committees) that the Councillor be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council;
 - 12.5.5 Recommend to the Leader of the Council that the Councillor be removed from the Cabinet, or removed from particular Executive Member responsibilities;
 - 12.5.6 Instruct the Monitoring Officer to arrange (or recommend that the Parish/ Town/ Community Council should arrange) training for the Councillor;
 - 12.5.7 Recommend to Council (or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council) that the Councillor be removed from all outside appointments to which they have been appointed or nominated by the authority;
 - 12.5.8 Recommend to Council (or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council) that it withdraws facilities provided to the Councillor by the Council, such as a computer, website and/or email;
 - 12.5.9 Recommend to Council (or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council) that the Councillor be excluded from the Council's Offices or other premises, with the exception of meeting rooms as necessary for attending Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings; or
 - 12.5.10 Take no further action.
- 12.6 [NOTE: The Sub-Committee has no power to suspend or disqualify the Councillor or to withdraw Councillor's basic or special responsibility allowances or any other payment made to the Councillor that they are entitled to under legislation]
- 12.7 The Members of Sub-Committee must then deliberate in private to consider what action, if any, should be taken (the Legal Adviser will attend).
- 12.8 On the Sub-Committee's return the Chairman must announce the Sub-Committee's decision (in relation to a Parish / Town/ Community Councillor, a recommendation to the Parish / Town/ Community Council). The Chairman will confirm whether and if so, what sanctions will be applied and the reasons for this decision.
- 12.9 The Sub-Committee must consider whether it should make any recommendations to the Council or in relation to a Parish / Town/ Community Councillor to the Parish / Town/ Community Council, with a view to promoting high standards of conduct among its Councillors.
- 12.10 The Chairman will confirm that a full written decision will be issued within 7 working days following the hearing and that the Sub-Committee's minutes will be published. The hearing will then be closed.

Appendix 4

ROLE OF INDEPENDENT PERSON AND RESERVE INDEPENDENT PERSONS – NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ROLE DESCRIPTION

Appointed by: The Council

Liaison with: Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer(s), Members of the Standards Committee, officers, District Councillors, and Town, Parish and Community Councillors within the district, key stakeholders within the community.

Reference to the IP includes the Independent Person and Reserve Independent Persons (except number 8 which is just the Reserve IP). The role is:

1. To assist the Council in promoting high standards of conduct by elected and co-opted Councillors of North Hertfordshire District Council and Parish/Town/Community Councillors and in particular to uphold the Code of Conduct adopted by the Council and underpinned by the seven principles of public life, namely selflessness, honesty, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness and leadership.
2. To assist the Council by acting as advocate and ambassador in promoting ethical behaviour and by developing a sound understanding of the ethical framework as it operates within North Hertfordshire District Council and its local councils.
3. To be available for ad hoc consultation by the Monitoring Officer where the Monitoring Officer is dealing with a matter that has not reached the stage of a formal complaint.
4. To be available for consultations on assessment of a complaint with the Monitoring Officer
5. To be available for consultation by the Monitoring Officer and/or the Standards Committee before a decision is taken as to whether to investigate a complaint or to seek local resolution of the same.
6. To be consulted by the Council through the Monitoring Officer and/or the Standards Committee before it makes a decision on an allegation that has been investigated and to be available to attend meetings of the Standards Committee in a non-voting advisory capacity.
7. To attend a CMH meeting of the Standards Sub-Committee and an FDH meeting to confirm the IP's views as to whether a breach of the Code of Conduct has occurred and any subsequent penalty (which will be taken into account).
8. To be available for consultation by any Councillor, including Parish/ Town or Community Councillor. This may be on an ad hoc basis for views on the Complaints Procedure or process as pre-arranged between the parties, either by telephone, on-line or at the Council's offices. It is not the role of the IP to act as advocate for the Councillor who is subject to the complaint, to negotiate complaint matters, or to provide substantive advice (legal or otherwise) on the allegations themselves. This will generally be confidential between the Councillor and IP, unless the Councillor confirms they have acted illegally or has a

Appendix 4

complaint about the Procedure. This will then be confirmed to the Monitoring Officer.

9. To participate in training events to develop skills, knowledge, and experience and in any networks developed for Independent Persons operating outside the District Council's area. To share information and promote debate and discussion amongst the Standards Committee following such training. To attend training events organised and promoted by the Council's Standards Committee and Monitoring Officer.
10. To attend quarterly liaison meetings with the Monitoring Officer, Chair and Vice Chair of Standards Committee, to consider standards matters generally, including although not limited to the review of relevant complaints handling documents, guidance and processes.

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Complaints Handling Procedure for matters relating to the Councillors' Code of Conduct

1. Introduction**Context**

1.1 These Procedures are “arrangements” and set out how a formal complaint against a Councillor can be made and will be handled. This covers complaints that an elected or co-opted Councillor~~Member~~ of NHC~~this authority~~ (or of a Parish/ Town or Community Council within the North Hertfordshire~~ts~~ area) has failed to comply with that authority's Councillors' Code of Conduct. This does not cover complaints against NHC or local Councils as a whole, nor employees of such Councils. Note that in respect of the latter, NHC has no legal remit to consider such complaints.

1.2 Under Section 28(6) and (7) of the Localism Act 2011, the Council must have in place “arrangements” under which allegations that a Member~~Councillor~~ or co-opted Member~~Councillor~~ of NHC~~the authority~~ (or of a Parish/ Town or Community Council within the authority's area), who are acting or appear to be acting as a Councillor, has failed to comply with the applicable Councillor's Code of Conduct, so that they~~is~~ can be, considered, investigated if appropriate and decisions made on such allegations. Any complaint will be assessed against the criteria set out in the flow chart under Stage 1 and Stage 2 (Appendix 1), and where this is a complaint against a local Councillor (Parish, Town or Community Councillor) you are strongly encouraged to resolve this locally in the first instance.

~~1.3 Such arrangements must include at least one appointed Independent Person. NHDC has an Independent Person whose views will be sought on all formal allegations (as part of the assessment of the complaint pre any investigation), as well as seeking their views (as it legally must) at any other stage during an investigation or determination of a formal complaint. NHDC also has a Reserve Independent Person who can be contacted by the Member who is subject to a formal complaint for procedural advice to the councillor.~~

2. **The Code of Conduct**

2.1 ~~NHDC~~NHC has adopted a Code of Conduct for Councillors, which ~~is available for inspection on the authority's website and on request from Reception at the Council Offices. can be found in Section 17 of the Council's Constitution [CLICK HERE].~~ .

2.2 Each Parish / Town or Community Council is also required to adopt a Code of Conduct. These should be available on the Parish / Town or Community Council's website and/or by request to the relevant council's Parish Clerk.

3. **Making a complaint**



- 3.1 If you wish to make a complaint, the 'Complaining about a Councillor' page provides details as to how you can do so and what information you should provide. **Please note that the complaint must relate to a Councillor's role, they should still be a Councillor and this is not the correct process to use if you are unhappy with a Council decision (which would, at District level, be the Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy. At Town, Parish and Community Council would be their local policy).**

The information you should provide in the complaint is:

3.1.1 which Councillor you are complaining about and the name of the Council of which they are a member:-

3.1.2 their alleged misconduct and dates; and

3.1.3 how you consider their alleged misconduct breaches the relevant authority's Councillor Code of Conduct.

PLEASE NOTE that, while you may disapprove of the way you believe a Councillor has acted, there are a number of issues that would preclude further action, as set out in **Stages 1-2** as it will not be in the public interests to pursue some complaints that the Council cannot legally or should not deal with – see [APPENDIX 1](#).

Complaints can be made by in writing or eform mail to:

[Making a complaint about a Councillor](#)

Or in writing to:

The Monitoring Officer, North Hertfordshire District Council, District Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City SG6 3JF

- 3.2 The Monitoring Officer is a senior NHC officer ~~of the authority who has statutory responsibility for maintaining the Register of Members' interests and who is responsible for overseeing adthe minister~~ administration of the Council's complaints handling arrangements against District and local Councillors ~~ing the system in respect of complaints of Member misconduct within the North Hertfordshire District. Under this Procedure, however, reference to the Monitoring Officer during the assessment or investigation is deemed to include a Deputy Monitoring Officer, including an external one who may undertake any of the steps set out in this process—.~~ Complaints may be referred to an external Deputy Monitoring Officer to consider if further action is warranted. [Circumstances in which a referral to an external Deputy Monitoring Officer or Investigator might arise include when:](#)



- 3.2.1 The complaint comes from a senior officer of the Council, such as the Managing Director, Chief Finance Officer or the Monitoring Officer and it would be inappropriate for the Monitoring Officer or an internal Deputy to investigate.
- 3.2.2 The complaint is about a high-profile Councillor such as the Leader, or an Executive Member of NHC and it would be inappropriate for the Monitoring Officer or an internal Deputy to investigate.
- 3.3 There are other complaints that the Monitoring Officer considers would not be appropriate for them to investigate.
- 3.4.3 Once a complaint with the information detailed under 3.1 has been received by In order to ensure that NHDGNHC has all the information required to process the complaint, please complete and send a complaint form. This can be made via the e-form link on the 'Complaining about a Councillor' page. A hard copy can also be requested at the Reception desk at the Council Offices. On receipt of this, the matter will be considered to be a formal complaint, and the process described relates to how this complaint will be handled.
- 3.5.3.4 A complainant will need to provide their name and a contact address, preferably also with an email address and telephone number, so that the authority NHC can acknowledge receipt of the complaint and keep a complainant informed of its progress. It is possible to keep the complainant's name and locality address confidential, if this is requested, although this is likely to may hamper and ultimately prevent any effective assessment or investigation. It is also in the interests of transparency and fairness, that a Councillor accused of misconduct, generally has a right to know who has made the allegations. A complainant can ask for their name and contact to remain confidential. If this is required, this can be entered on the complaint form, with an explanation for the request as to why this is required. The Monitoring Officer will consider the request and, if granted, they will not provide disclose the complainant's name and locality address to the Member Councillor without the complainant's prior consent. The only exceptions to this will be if this is referred to the Police, or may be if other regulatory bodies (for example the auditors or external fraud investigators Police) become involved. I, and in these circumstances that case a request for confidentiality disclosure would be a matter for those bodies to consider.
- 3.6.3.5 NHC The authority does not normally investigate consider/ investigate anonymous complaints, unless there is a clear public interest in doing so. In any event, NHC the authority's ability to do would be severely limited, as it is impossible in



such situations to request further information from a complainant or provide confirmation of any decision.

3.73.6 The Complaints Handling Procedure Flowchart at Appendix 1 includes the aspects of the complaint and assessment criteria that the Monitoring Officer takes into account before deciding whether to consider the complaint (Stage 1-2) and assess the complaint (Stage 3). are set out in the / is annexed at Appendix 1. The only exception will be a direct referral back to Standards Sub-Committee for failure to comply with a sanction (as per 5.16 below).

4. Who is the Independent Person?

4.1 The Independent Person is a statutory office holder appointed by NHCthe Council. A description of their role is set out in Appendix 54.

4.2 The Procedural arrangements must include at least one appointed Independent Person. NHC has an Independent Person whose views will be sought on all formal allegations (as part of the assessment of the complaint – before any investigation), as well as seeking their views (as it legally must) at any other stage during an investigation or determination of a formal complaint. NHC also currently has two Reserve Independent Persons who can be contacted by a Councillor who is subject to a formal complaint for procedural advice, or who may be involved at other stages if the Independent Person is unable to participate. This will be set out in any formal letter to the complainant and Councillor confirming that a complaint has been received.

4.3 The Council has also appointed two at least one Reserve Independent Persons who carries out the role of the Independent Person when they are unavailable, or has a conflict of interest. References to the Independent Person in this document include the Independent Person and the Reserve Independent Persons, unless otherwise stated.

5. How will my formal complaint be handled?

5.1 The complaint Monitoring Officer¹ will be acknowledged within 5 working days through the contact information provided by the complainant.

5.2 The Monitoring Officer will review every complaint received and will consult the Independent Person. The following Stages will be applied. If it this is a Parish, Town, or Community Councillor complaint, then as per Appendix 1, confirmation will be sought from the complainant that they havehas tried to resolve this issue at

±



- local level. As a first step, the complainant will be referred to a local resolution procedure unless this is impractical or unreasonable for either party to do so. This does not prevent a formal complaint being progressed at a later date if the first step is unsuccessful, but it encourages a quicker localised resolution (as this formal process can take in excess of 6 months from receipt of a formal complaint to conclude).
- 5.25.3 Where a Parish, Town, or Community Councillor complaint cannot be resolved locally or where it relates to a NHC Councillor, the tests under Appendix 1 (Stage 1-2) will be considered and at Stage 3 an assessment decisions taken, which can be one of the following:
- 5.2.15.3.1 Merits no further action investigation;
- 5.2.25.3.2 Merits informal action (including mediation or training or suggested apology);
- 5.2.35.3.3 Merits further investigation; ~~or~~
- 5.3.4 Should be referred to the Standards Sub-Committee.
- The Monitoring Officer does not have to take the steps in 5.3.1 to 5.3.4 in the order in which they are listed.
- 5.35.4 This assessment decision will normally be taken within 28 working days of receipt of the formal complaint and considered in accordance with the Assessment Criteria in Appendix 1 annexed at Appendix 2.
- 5.45.5 Where the Monitoring Officer requires additional information in order to come to a decision, they will request this information.
- 5.55.6 Where the complaint has moved to Stage 2, A copy of the complaint and any relevant documentation will be forwarded to the Member Councillor for consideration and comment. The Member Councillor will be given 14 days to respond ~~provide any comments, on this (~~ unless there are reasons why this deadline needs to be extend this deadline, for example for holidays, sick leave, a criminal or a whistleblowing investigation). The Councillor is expected to co-operate with Monitoring Officer and not to attempt to interfere with impede/obstruct any part of the process, or intimidate any person involved in this process. Failure to co-operate can be a breach of the Code, in addition to the original complaint.
- 5.65.7 If the complaint relates to a Parish/ Town or Community Councillor, see 5.2 above; and additionally if this is then considered under Stages 1-2, the Monitoring Officer may also ~~inform that Council of the complaint and~~ seek the views of the relevant Clerk, in confidence, before coming to an assessment decision ~~deciding whether~~



- ~~the complaint merits informal action or formal investigation under Stage 3.~~ Such views would again be expected within 14 days (unless there are reasons ~~why this deadline needs to be extend~~ the deadline on grounds such as those at 5.6 above~~, such as holiday or sick leave~~).
- 5.75.8 Once the ~~Member~~Councillor's response (and any Clerk's response) has been received and/or the deadline has expired for such comments ~~(and none has been forthcoming)~~, the Monitoring Officer will consult the Independent Person. This consultation may result in the request for further information from any relevant party, and further consultation will take place. Following this the Monitoring Officer will make one of the ~~initial~~ assessment decisions set out under 5.23. above (Stage 3).
- 5.85.9 When the Monitoring Officer has taken a decision, they will inform the complainant and the ~~Member~~Councillor (and in cases involving a Parish/ Town or Community Councillor) the Clerk (or Chairman as may be appropriate) of the decision and the reasons for that decision. These will remain confidential.
- 5.95.10 Complainants should ~~n~~Note that this will be the ~~preliminary~~ assessment decision of whether there appears to be a case to answer and whether to investigate, or consider alternative action. Further action will require a complainant's co-operation during the investigation and, if necessary, any ~~full~~ hearing, which is likely to be held in public. The complainant would be required to attend such a hearing and provide their evidence/ and or answer questions relating to the complaint.
- 5.11 ~~In appropriate cases,~~Where the Monitoring Officer ~~may~~ seek to resolve the complaint informally, without the need for a formal investigation (as per 5.23.2.) ~~they~~The Monitoring Officer will consult the Independent Person on such action. Informal resolution may involve the ~~Member~~Councillor ~~agree~~accepting that their conduct was unacceptable and offering an apology, or other remedial action ~~by the authority~~. Where the ~~Member~~Councillor ~~or the authority~~ makes a reasonable offer of informal resolution, but the complainant is not willing to accept the offer, the Monitoring Officer will take account of this in deciding whether the complaint merits any further action~~investigation~~. Equally, if a ~~Member~~Councillor refuses to engage with such an informal approach (for example by not apologising, or attending training), the Monitoring Officer may reconsider the decision ~~and~~ decide whether to refer the complaint ~~(and failure to co-operate)~~ for investigation, or directly to the Standards Sub-Committee for the original complaint and (and failure to co-operate) to be determined.



5.10—If the complaint identifies potential criminal conduct or breach of other regulation ~~by any person~~, the Monitoring Officer ~~is likely has the power~~ to refer ~~it this~~ to the Police or other regulatory agencies. If ~~the complaint this~~ relates to an alleged Disclosable Pecuniary Interests offence², ~~it then this~~ will be dealt with under ~~any~~ agreed Protocol with Hertfordshire Constabulary, and the Police (and finally the Director of Public Prosecutions) will be the relevant body that determines whether further action should be taken on such a complaint. ~~The Council cannot influence any decisions taken by the Ppolice or other regulatory body, and would have no role in their of that decision, and would not wish to prejudice such bodies' consideration or enquiries other than to ; therefore, no further action is the likely decision other than referral of such complaints and co-operation with them. such bodies.~~

5.115.12 **Please note** that ~~where a complainant wishes decides to withdraw the complaint the mMonitoring oOfficer is unlikely then to take no further action on the matter.~~, with the exception of a referral to Ppolice/ regulatory body - where a withdrawal of a complaint would be for them to considerreferral, the complainant may decide to withdraw the complaint assessment Stage. No further action is then likely to be taken on the matter. If the complainant wishes to withdraw the complaint during the investigation, then this will be considered by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person as to whether the investigation will continue. The decision to terminate an investigation will, for example, depend on the nature of the allegations and the parties involved.

5.125.13 Similarly, if the MemberCouncillor resigns or is not re-elected during this assessment or a later stage of the Complaints Handling Procedure, the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person may decide to terminate *or suspend* any further steps for up to 14 months from the date on which they cease to be a MemberCouncillor. This is because the Complaints Handling Procedure only applies to elected and co-opted Councillors. Further action *may be taken* on the complaint during that 14-month period if the Councillor is re-elected / or is co-opted back to the Council during that period. This decision will be taken by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person. If the Councillor is not re-elected/co-opted during that period, further action on the complaint will automatically cease.

5.135.14 **NOTE:** if a MemberCouncillor has been subject to a finding of the Standards Sub-Committee and sanctions have been imposed under 9.1. or by Council ~~under~~ and the MemberCouncillor has failed, without reasonable excuse,

² Under s34 Localism Act 2011



to comply with a sanction, then the Monitoring Officer will refer this directly back to the Standards Sub-Committee ('direct referral') for determination.

5.14—There is no further right of internal review or appeal by a complainant following a decision on the preliminary assessment not to investigate (unless new evidence is then submitted and this will, in any event, be subject to the Assessment Criteria in Appendix 1).

5.15 Brief and anonymised versions of the complaints and any outcomes are reported through to the Standards Committee and Full Council.

6. How is the investigation conducted?

6.1. The Council has adopted a procedure for the investigation of misconduct complaints, which is attached as Appendix 32 to these arrangements.

6.2. If the Monitoring Officer decides that a complaint merits investigation, they may appoint an Investigating Officer, who may be a Deputy Monitoring Officer, another senior NHC officer ~~of the authority~~, an officer of another authority or an external investigator. This Officer's purpose is to conduct an objective investigation on the merits of the complaint and whether there appears to be a case to answer that will be presented to the Standards Sub-Committee. The Officer is not there to represent the complainant or the MemberCouncillor and there is no difference in the status of the report prepared by an Investigating Officer and that of the Monitoring Officer.

6.3 Any investigation should be completed within 43 months, and parties must co-operate to ensure that this deadline can be met (unless there are extenuating circumstances to justify extending this). Any failure by the MemberCouncillor complained of to co-operate, or attempt to interfere with impede OR obstruct any part of the process, or intimidate any person involved in the process, may, as previously indicated, be considered a separate potential breach of the Code of Conduct, notwithstanding the any original complaint issues. Equally should a complainant attempt to interfere with impede/obstruct any part of the process, or intimidate any person involved in the process, the Monitoring Officer reserves the right to consider terminate the investigation. Any such decision will be taken in consultation with the Independent Person.

6.4 The Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer will decide whether they need to interview a complainant to understand the nature of the complaint, any events surrounding it and consider what documents need to be seen, a ~~(and~~ any other party who needs to be interviewed). Such This interviews may be by telephone or in person and are is likely to be recorded and that record used/ produced as part of the witness evidence, t ~~(together~~ with any other relevant evidence that has been



produced). If any witness(es) to the alleged breaches of the Code have been identified, the Monitoring Officer/ Investigating Officer will decide whether to interview those witnesses. Again, these interview arrangements may be by telephone or in person and will be recorded/ used as part of witness evidence. This is to prevent disagreements as to what has or has not been said at interview. Any witnesses must be identified by the complainant at this stage of the Procedure, as late witnesses will generally not be accepted after the investigation has been concluded.

6.5 The Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer will provide the MemberCouncillor with a copy of the complaint, and ask the MemberCouncillor to provide their explanation of events, and to identify what documents they need to see and the name(s) of anyone witnesses who the believe should be y need to interviewed. The MemberCouncillor and any of their witnesses relevant to the alleged breaches, are likely to be interviewed on the same basis as under 6.4. Any witnesses must be identified at this stage of the Procedure as late witnesses will generally not be accepted after the investigation has been concluded. The MemberCouncillor is expected to co-operate with any investigation. Failure to do so may be cited as a potential breach of the Code of Conduct. Failure to cooperate can be a breach of the code, in addition to the original complaint

~~6.6~~ ~~In exceptional cases, where the provisions of 3.4 apply and the Monitoring Officer has agreed it is appropriate to keep the identity of a complainant confidential, or where disclosure of details of the complaint to the Member might prejudice the investigation, the Monitoring Officer can delete names and addresses from the papers given to the Member, or delay notifying the Member until the investigation has progressed sufficiently. Anonymised complaints are, however, difficult to investigate effectively and if the Monitoring Officer or Investigating Officer believes that this is hampering the investigation, they may (after consulting the Independent Person) decide to terminate the investigation. The complainant will be given the opportunity to change their mind and disclose their details. If that does not occur then further action is unlikely to be taken on the complaint.~~ 6.7 At the end of their investigation, the Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer will produce a draft report (“the Investigation Report”) and will send copies of that draft report, in confidence, to the complainant, ~~and~~ to the MemberCouncillor concerned ~~(and where relevant and to and (where relevant) the Monitoring Officer where they were not the investigating officer)~~, so that there is an opportunity to identify any inaccuracies and any matter in that draft report of dispute or which the parties believe require more consideration. The Independent Person will also see a copy of the report for comment. Relevant parties will be given 21 days to respond. The complainant / MemberCouncillor will be expected to raise issues with the draft report at this stage.



~~6.7~~ ~~6.8~~ Equally, parties are encouraged to acknowledge or accept any findings at the draft report stage, so that the issues can be narrowed to those that remain in dispute. It is possible that parties will disagree with the findings / reasons on whether there is a case to answer in the report. Comments and issues will be considered by the Monitoring Officer/ Investigating Officer; errors will be ~~corrected, corrected~~; however, this does not mean the report findings will be changed. A summary of these comments from the complainant/~~Member~~Councillor are likely to be included in the final report.

~~6.89~~ Having received and considered any comments made on the draft Investigation Report, it will then be finalised. Where an Investigating Officer has been appointed, the Investigating Officer will send their final report (again in confidence) to the complainant, the ~~Member~~Councillor and to the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person. Note that this report will remain confidential until ~~or unless~~ the Monitoring Officer determines notifies parties otherwise or in any hearing, the Standards Sub-Committee determines that this matter shall be heard in public³.

~~6.9~~ ~~7.2~~ Where an Investigating Officer has been appointed and if the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person are not satisfied that the investigation has covered the issues sufficiently the Monitoring Officer may ask the Investigating Officer to reconsider their draft report. The Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person, will review any revised report and may decide that there remains no case to answer or further action is required, as set out below.

7. What happens if the Investigating Officer, or Monitoring Officer, concludes that there is no evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct?

7.1 Where an Investigating Officer has been appointed by the Monitoring Officer to conduct an investigation, the Monitoring Officer will review the Investigating Officer's report in consultation with the Independent Person. If the Monitoring Officer is satisfied that the Investigating Officer's report is sufficient and there is no apparent case to answer of a failure to comply with the Code, the Monitoring Officer will write to the parties (*and to the Clerk, if the complaint relates to a Parish/Town or Community Councillor, or Chairman as may be appropriate*), to notify them that they are satisfied that no further action is required. The report shall remain confidential and other than those parties who have received a report, shall not be disclosed further. An anonymised summary of the complaint and outcome will,

³ In accordance with Data Protection Act/ GDPR principles and exemptions and any requirements under the Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12A.



however, be reported through to Standards Committee and Full Council during the year.

~~7.2 Where an Investigating Officer has been appointed and if the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person are not satisfied that the investigation has covered the issues sufficiently the Monitoring Officer may ask the Investigating Officer to reconsider their report. The Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person, will review any revised report and may decide that there remains no case to answer or further action is required, as set out below.~~

8. What happens if the Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer concludes in the report that there is evidence a case to answer of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct?

~~8.1. If an Investigating Officer has been appointed the Monitoring Officer will review the Investigating Officer's report and will then either send the matter for a hearing before the Standards Sub-Committee or, in consultation with the Independent Person, seek an Alternative remedy. If the Monitoring Officer is satisfied that the Investigating Officer's report is sufficient and there is an apparent case to answer of a failure to comply with the Code, the Monitoring Officer will write to the parties (and to the Clerk, if the complaint relates to a Parish/Town or Community Councillor, or Chairman as may be appropriate), to notify them that the matter will proceed to a hearing before the Standards Sub-Committee or, in consultation with the Independent Person, that the scope for an Alternative remedy will be considered.~~

Alternative remedy

~~8.1.8.2.~~ The Monitoring Officer may consider that the matter can reasonably be resolved without the need for a hearing. In such a case, they will consult the Independent Person and the complainant and seek to agree a fair resolution which also helps to ensure higher standards of conduct for the future. Such resolution may include the MemberCouncillor acknowledging that their conduct was unacceptable and offering an apology, and/or other remedial action (such as training or mediation) ~~by the authority~~. If the MemberCouncillor complies with the suggested resolution, the Monitoring Officer will report the matter to the Standards Committee (*and the Parish Council*) for information, but will take no further action. If the MemberCouncillor fails to abide by the Alternative remedy the Monitoring Office may re-open the issue and refer the case to the Standards Sub-Committee for a hearing to determine whether there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct.

Hearings



8.3. The Councillor will be expected to attend, unless there is a reasonable excuse for not doing so – as notified to the Monitoring Officer in advance of any hearing.

8.2.8.4. Normal Committee rules apply as to whether the Sub-Committee meets in public or private with the presumption that any hearings will be in public in NHC offices.

8.3.8.5. In all but straightforward cases there will be a preliminary administrative hearing of the Standards Sub-Committee, to case-manage the preparation and arrangements for the hearing called a **Case Management Hearing** – (“CMH”), followed by a **Final Determination Hearing** (“FDH”). The Membership of those hearings may or may not be the same.

CMH

8.4.8.6. The CMH will deal with administrative issues, such as fixing a date for the final hearing/ length of the hearing/ final evidence or representations that may be presented at the FDH.

8.5.8.7. This CMH should be arranged between 35 - 42 calendar days after the report has been sent to the parties.

8.6.8.8. As part of the investigation, the MemberCouncillor will have been asked and should have informed the Investigating Officer of any witnesses that the MemberCouncillor wishes to rely on / and evidence obtained as part of the Investigation. However, if this has not taken place the MemberCouncillor will be expected to confirm 14 days prior to the CMH:

8.8.1 the areas of the Investigating Officer’s report that the Councillor disputes (and the factual reasons for doing so), including evidence from current witnesses that are relevant to the matter of dispute; and-

~~a. the evidence (including the names of any witnesses) that they intend to produce that is relevant to the DISPUTED ISSUE(S) complaint;~~

8.8.2 whether they will be represented at the final hearing (and details of that representative); and

~~any of the areas of the Investigating Officer’s report that the MemberCouncillor disagrees with (and the factual reasons for doing so).~~

8.9 If the MemberCouncillor fails to confirm the above information by a date specified prior to the CMH or fails to attend the hearing without reasonable explanation, then this may be considered a further potential breach of the Code of Conduct (for failure to co-operate). In the event that the Councillor fails (with or without excuse) to



- ~~attend. t~~The CMH may take place in the absence of ~~MemberCouncillor, in the event that the MemberCouncillor fails (with or without excuse) to attend. Where~~ ~~t~~The ~~MemberCouncillor attends they~~ may be represented or accompanied during the hearing by a ~~s~~Solicitor, ~~c~~Counsel or, with the permission of the Sub-Committee, another person.
- 8.10 The ~~MemberCouncillors~~ of the Sub-Committee, Independent Person, Investigating Officer, Monitoring Officer, or Legal Adviser may ask questions of the ~~MemberCouncillor~~ and ~~of the~~ complainant, ~~if present.~~
- 8.11 The Sub-Committee may take legal advice from its Legal Adviser, or seek the opinion of the Independent Person at any time during the CMH and may retire to deliberate in private before it comes to ~~a~~its decision. The Legal Adviser will retire with the Members of the Committee and the substance of any legal advice provided when the Sub-Committee retires, will be shared with the Member and the Investigating Officer if they are present when the Members return to the hearing. The Independent Person will not retire with the Sub-Committee. If the Sub-Committee requires the opinion of the Independent Person on CMH matters, this should be requested prior to retiring to consider the decision/ or in any event before the decision is taken. **Note:** as the CMH is an administrative hearing and not the determination of the complaint, such opinion *may* rather than *has to be* sought prior to the decision being made.
- ~~Where it becomes apparent at the CMH thatAny the Councillor wishes to rely on further witness evidence that the Member wishes to rely upon at the final hearing they must send the details should be sent to the Monitoring Officer within 14 days of the CMH hearing. They will be notified also to the complainant. This is to ensure fairness for all the parties concerned and to (where appropriate) to narrow issues facts/ evidence and arguments that are in dispute.~~
- 8.12 ~~Other than in exceptional circumstances, t~~The ~~date of the~~ FDH ~~must should~~ be ~~fixedarranged~~ at the CMH, within 35-42 calendar days of the CMH.
- FDH**
- 8.13 The Council has agreed a procedure for the FDH for the complaint, which is attached as Appendix ~~3 to these arrangements.~~
- 8.14 At the FDH, the Investigating Officer or the Monitoring Officer (or nominated representative) will present their report, call such witnesses as they consider necessary and make representations to substantiate their conclusion that there is a case to answer that the ~~MemberCouncillor~~ has failed to comply with the Code of



- Conduct. [The Standards Sub-Committee may set out a timetable for the hearing.](#)
- 8.15 At the FDH, the ~~MemberCouncillor~~ will not be able to challenge evidence from a witness that has been contained/ reflected in the Investigation Report, unless the ~~MemberCouncillor~~ has indicated by the specified date prior to the CMH that a particular witness' evidence is disputed and why. Subject to that indication, the Monitoring Officer/ Investigating Officer will be expected to ~~request-secure~~ the attendance of that witness at the hearing. [If the Councillor has not indicated by a specified date that a witness' evidence is disputed, the Monitoring Officer is unlikely to will not call request that witness' attendance to attend the FDH.](#)
- 8.16 ~~For this purpose, the Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer is likely to ask the complainant should be prepared~~ to attend and give evidence to the Sub-Committee. The ~~MemberCouncillor~~ will then have an opportunity to ask any relevant questions of the Investigating Officer or witnesses produced at the hearing through the Chairman, give their evidence, call witnesses and to make representations to the Sub-Committee as to why they consider that they have not failed to comply with the Code of Conduct. The Members of the Sub-Committee, Independent Person, Investigating Officer, Monitoring Officer, or Legal Adviser may ask questions of any of the ~~witnesseswitnesses~~ present (including the ~~MemberCouncillor~~ and complainant). The Chairman of the Sub-Committee has the ability to halt any questions that they believe are irrelevant, ~~repetitive~~~~repetitive~~, or haranguing in nature.
- 8.17 The Sub-Committee may take legal advice from its Legal Adviser at any time during the FDH and may retire to deliberate in private before it comes to its decision. The Legal Adviser will retire with the Members of the Sub-Committee and the substance of any legal advice given to the Members in private session will be confirmed when the meeting reconvenes in public session. The Independent Person will not retire with the Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee should request the ~~view~~~~opinion~~ of the Independent Person prior to retiring to consider the decision/ or in any event before the decision is taken, on whether there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct. Please note that in accordance with section 28(7) of the Localism Act 2011 the views of the Independent Person are to be sought, and taken into account, by the Sub-Committee before it makes its decision on an allegation that it has decided to investigate.
- 8.18 The Sub-Committee, with the benefit of any ~~views~~~~advice~~ from the Independent Person, may conclude that the ~~MemberCouncillor~~ *did not* fail to comply with the Code of Conduct, and dismiss the complaint. [In these circumstances, the case is at an end.](#)



8.19 If the Sub-Committee concludes that the MemberCouncillor *did* fail to comply with the Code of Conduct, the Chair will inform the MemberCouncillor of this finding and of the reasons for it. ~~The~~ Sub-Committee will then consider what action, if any, ~~it~~ ~~the Sub-Committee~~ should take as a result of the MemberCouncillor's failure to comply with the Code of Conduct. In doing this, the Sub-Committee will give the MemberCouncillor an opportunity to make representations to it and will seek the view of the Independent Person on any sanction, but will then decide what action, if any, to take in respect of the matter. The Sub-Committee may retire in private session to deliberate on what, if any, sanctions will be applied. The Legal Adviser will retire with the Members of the Sub-Committee and the substance of any legal advice given to the Members in private session will be confirmed when the meeting reconvenes in public session. The Independent Person will not retire with the Sub-Committee

9. What action can the Standards Sub-Committee take where a MemberCouncillor has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct?

9.1 The Council has delegated to the Sub-Committee such of its powers to take action in respect of individual MemberCouncillors as may be necessary to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. The Sub Committee will impose sanctions (or a combination of sanctions) commensurate with the nature and gravity of the breach of the Code of Conduct and confirm their reasons for doing so. Accordingly the sanctions available to the Sub-Committee are to:-

- 9.1.1 Publish its findings in respect of the MemberCouncillor's conduct (e.g. in a local newspaper, in print or on-line or both) ~~, note that~~ Aany decision will be published on the Council's website in any event;
- 9.1.2 Report its findings to Council (*or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council*) for information;
- 9.1.3 Report its findings and recommend to Council (*or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council*) that the MemberCouncillor be issued with a formal censure or be reprimanded;
- 9.1.4 Recommend to the MemberCouncillor's Group Leader (or in the case of un-grouped MemberCouncillors, recommend to Council or to Committees) that the MemberCouncillor be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council;
- 9.1.5 Recommend to the Leader of the Council that the MemberCouncillor be removed from the Cabinet, or removed from particular Executive Member responsibilities;



- 9.1.6 Instruct the Monitoring Officer to arrange (or recommend that the Parish /Town / Community Council should arrange) training for the MemberCouncillor;
- 9.1.7 Recommend to Council (or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council) that the MemberCouncillor be removed from all outside appointments to which they have been appointed or nominated by the authority;
- 9.1.8 Recommend to Council (or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council) that it withdraws facilities provided to the MemberCouncillor by the Council, such as a computer, website and/or email ~~and internet access be withdrawn~~;
- 9.1.9 Recommend to Council (or the Parish / Town/ Community Council) that the MemberCouncillor be excluded from the Council's Offices or other premises, with the exception of meeting rooms (real or virtual) as necessary for attending Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings;
or
- 9.1.10 Take no further action.
- 9.2 The Sub-Committee has no power to suspend or disqualify the MemberCouncillor or to withdraw MemberCouncillors' basic or special responsibility allowances or any other payment made to the Councillor that they are entitled to under legislation.

What happens at the end of the hearing?

- 9.3 At the end of the hearing, the Chair will state the decision of the Standards Sub-Committee with a summary of the reasons as to whether or not the MemberCouncillor failed to comply with the Code of Conduct and, if the MemberCouncillor did fail to comply, any actions which the Sub-Committee resolves to take.
- 9.4 As soon as reasonably practicable thereafter (and in any event within 7 working days), a formal decision notice will be prepared by the Legal Adviser in consultation with the Sub-Committee, and send a copy to the complainant, the MemberCouncillor (and to the Parish Council or Chairman as may be appropriate) by the Monitoring Officer, and make that decision notice available for public inspection and available on the Council's website.
- 9.5 There is no further right of internal review or appeal following the determination hearing by either the MemberCouncillor or complainant. Either party may seek independent advice and apply for Judicial Review of the decision or may consider making a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), although there is limited remit for the LGO to consider complaints and cannot revisit any decision taken.

10. Revision of these arrangements

The full Standards Committee may amend these arrangements, and has delegated to a Chairman of the Sub-Committee the right to depart from these arrangements where they consider that it is expedient to do so in order to secure the effective and fair consideration of any matter. Minor amendments may be made by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person, [Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards Committee](#) under delegated authority.

Appendix 1 ~~___~~—Complaints Handling Procedure Flowchart [& Assessment Criteria](#)

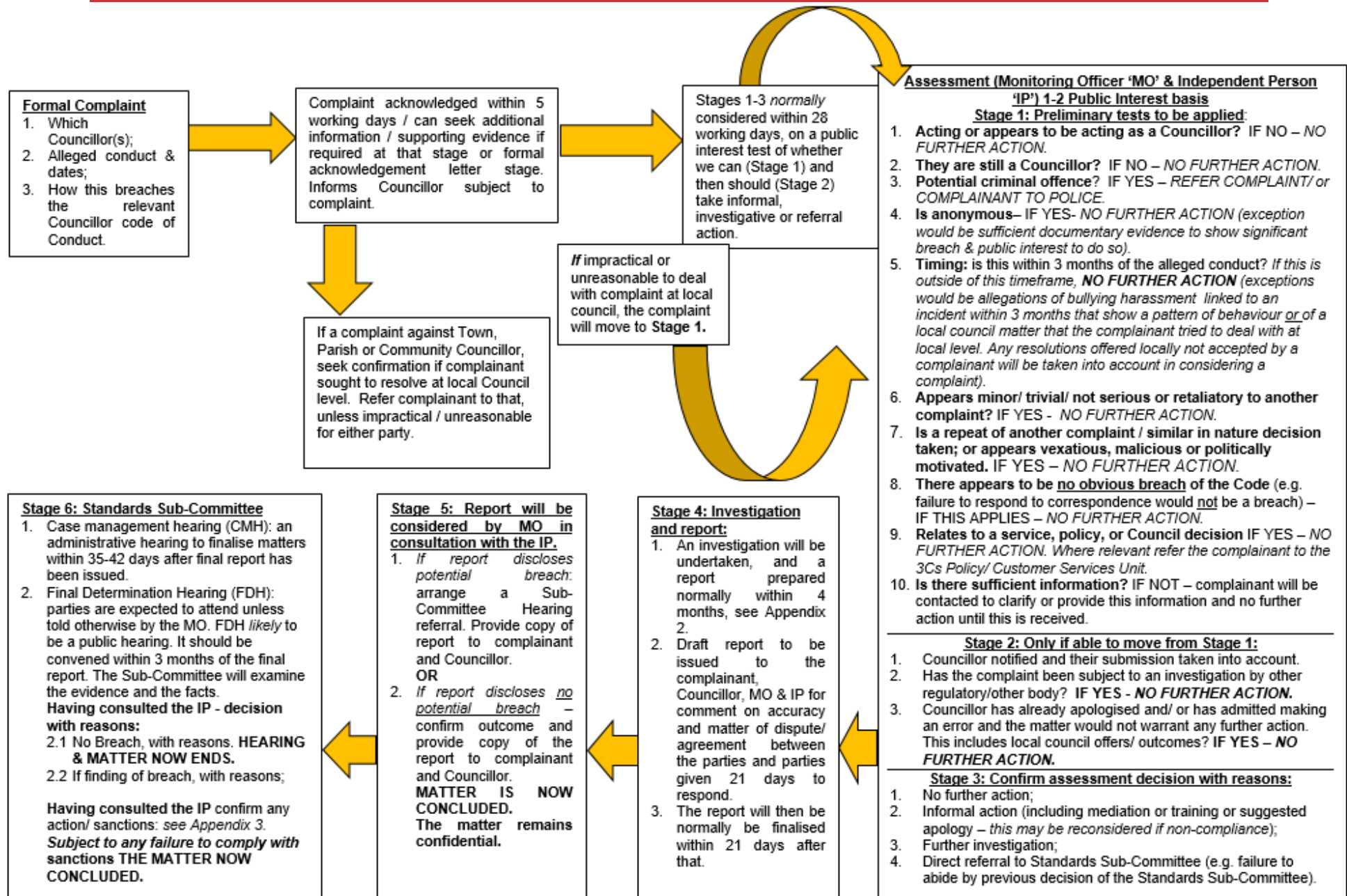
Appendix 2 ~~___~~—[NHDC/NHC -Standard Complaints Assessment Criteria](#)

~~Appendix 3~~—Investigation Procedure – information/ Instructions for Investigating Officer

Appendix ~~43~~ ~~___~~—The Final Determination Hearing (FDR) Procedure for Standards Sub-Committee

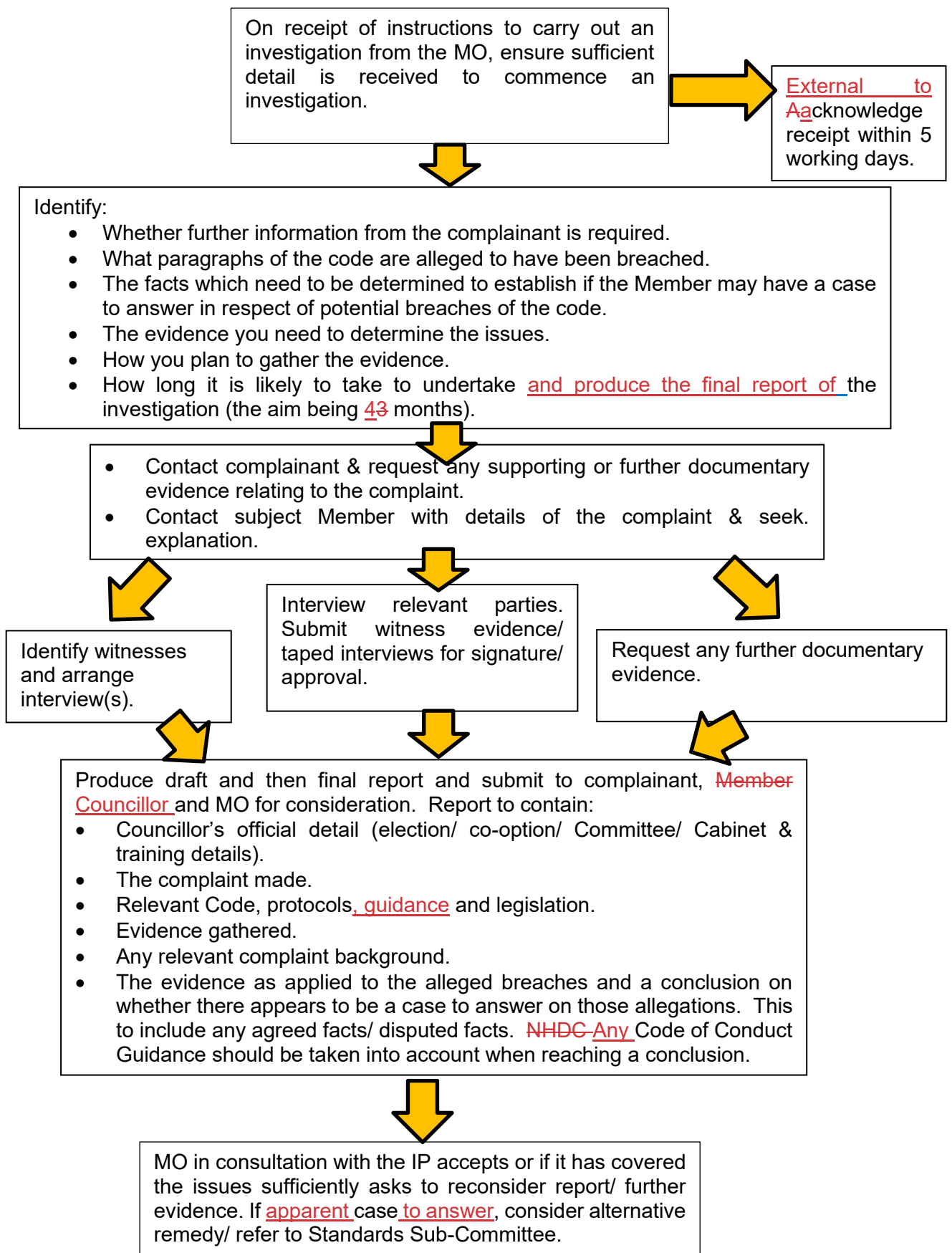
Appendix ~~54~~ ~~___~~—Independent Person and Reserve Independent Persons Role Description

Complaints Handling Procedure Flowchart & Assessment Criteria (simplified summary – full details within the Procedure)



Appendix 23

Investigation Procedure – information / instructions for Investigating Officer



Appendix 34

THE FINAL DETERMINATION HEARING (FDR) PROCEDURE FOR THE STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE

The Standards Sub-Committee (“the Sub-Committee”) must have an efficient and effective hearing process. This will assist Members of the Sub-Committee to deal with all the issues that need to be resolved in a way that is fair to the MemberCouncillor subject to the allegation, any complainant and witnesses involved. This procedure sets out a consistent approach for all concerned.

1. Interpretation

“Complainant”: means the person who referred the allegation to Monitoring Officer.

“CMH”: means the Sub-Committee Case Management Hearing that deals with administrative and procedural matters and clarifies the issues for the Final Determination Hearing (FDH).

“FDH”: means Sub-Committee Final Determining Hearing that hears evidence; decides if a MemberCouncillor has breached the Code of Conduct; and, if so, the sanction to be imposed.

“Investigating Officer”:

means the Monitoring Officer, Deputy or Investigating Officer or their nominated representative(s).

“Independent Person/ IP”:

means Independent Person and Reserve Independent Persons appointed by the Council under the Localism Act 2011, whose views must be sought by the authority before it takes a decision on an allegation which it has decided to investigate under section 28(7) of the Localism Act 2011, and whose views can be sought by the authority at any other stage, or by a MemberCouncillor (or a MemberCouncillor or co-opted MemberCouncillor of a Town, Parish or Community Council) against whom an allegation has been made.

“Legal Adviser”: means the officer responsible for providing legal advice to the Sub-Committee. This may be the Monitoring Officer, another legally qualified officer of the authority, or someone appointed for this purpose from outside the authority.

“MemberCouncillor”: means the MemberCouncillor, co-opted MemberCouncillor of NHDC/NHC or a Town or Parish Councillor (within the NHDC/NHC area) who is the subject of the complaint.

“Proper Officer”: means the designated Committee Services officer or nominated representative.

2. Representation

2.1. The MemberCouncillor may be represented or accompanied during the hearing by a sSolicitor, cCounsel or, with the permission of the Sub-Committee, another person.

<p>Such person to have been notified to the Standards Sub-Committee, and agreed where applicable, at the CMH.</p> <p>2.2. Where a representative has been appointed, reference below to <u>MemberCouncillor</u> will (except in respect of any evidence from the <u>MemberCouncillor</u> concerned) mean the representative.</p> <p>2.3 Where a representative is present the <u>MemberCouncillor</u> must indicate if the representative is to ask questions on the <u>MemberCouncillor</u>'s behalf and make any submissions. Once such arrangements have been confirmed, they will be applied throughout the hearing.</p>
<p>3. Legal Advice</p>
<p>3.1. The Sub-Committee may take legal advice from its Legal Adviser at any time during the hearing or while they are considering the final decision on the potential breach(es) of the Code and any sanctions.</p> <p>3.2. The Legal Adviser will provide a summary of any legal advice given to the Members of the Sub-Committee in private session, when the meeting reconvenes in public session.</p>
<p>4. Voting</p>
<p>4.1 Each Member of the Sub-Committee will have one vote, and all matters/issues will be decided by a simple majority of votes cast.</p> <p>4.2 Abstentions will not be permitted. The Sub-Committee's decision will record whether it was unanimous or taken by a majority.</p>
<p>5. Quorum</p>
<p>5.1. The Proper Officer or their representative will confirm whether the Committee is quorate. A quorum for the Sub-Committee will be three elected Members of the Council.</p> <p>5.2. Where the complaint involves an allegation of misconduct against a Parish <u>MemberCouncillor</u>, then a non-voting Parish <u>Member</u> of the Standards Committee should also be present.</p> <p>5.3. The Sub-Committee must nominate a Chairman for the meeting.</p> <p>5.4. The Independent Person must be present throughout the Sub-Committee hearing.</p>
<p>6. Opening/ Setting the Scene and Preliminary Procedural Issues</p>
<p><u>6.1. The Members of the Sub-Committee shall determine whether the hearing will be considered in private session.</u></p>

6.1.6.2. The Chairman must explain the procedure for the hearing and remind all parties to turn off mobile phones, audible alarms, and similar devices etc. If the proceedings are in open session they will be recorded.

6.2.6.3. The Chairman must ask all present to introduce themselves.

6.3.6.4. Most if not all of the procedural/ administrative issues should have been resolved by the CMH and any Sub-Committee resolutions complied with. The Sub-Committee may, however, resolve any issues (including failure to abide by resolutions from the CMH and absence of parties/ witnesses and whether to proceed).

7. The presentation of the Complaint and evidence of the case to answer on alleged breach of the Code of Conduct

7.1. The Investigating Officer will be invited to present the report including any evidence or other material and make any representations to support the relevant conclusions on a case to answer from the report. This will be based on the complaint made to the Council and any alleged failure to co-operate with the investigation or hearing preparation (where relevant). Witnesses will be called to give evidence or have their witnesses evidence taken as accepted, where the Councillor has indicated that the witness evidence is not disputed this is the case.

7.2. The MemberCouncillor against whom the complaint has been made (or their representative) may question the Investigating Officer on the content of the report and question any witnesses called by the Investigating Officer.⁴ (This is the MemberCouncillor's opportunity to ask questions arising from the report and not to make a statement).

7.3. Members of the Sub-Committee, the Independent Person and the Legal Adviser may question the Investigating Officer about the content of the report and/or any witnesses (including the complainant) called by the Investigating Officer.

8. The MemberCouncillor's case

8.1. The MemberCouncillor will then be given the opportunity to present their case (and call any relevant witnesses) including any evidence or other material and make any representations to address the specific allegations before the Sub-Committee.

8.2. The Investigating Officer may question the MemberCouncillor and/or any witnesses.

8.3. Members of the Sub-Committee, the Independent Person and the Legal Adviser may question the MemberCouncillor and/or any of the MemberCouncillor's witnesses.

⁴ **NOTE** If the Member disputes any relevant fact in the Investigating Officer's report, without having given prior notice of the dispute they will be required to give good reasons for not mentioning it when the draft report was finalised or in any event at the CMH. Such behaviour is likely to affect the weight of the Member's evidence on that issue and/ or be treated as evidence of failure to co-operate with an investigation.

9. Summing Up
<p>9.1. The Investigating Officer will be given the opportunity to sum up the complaint and any relevant representations on the case to answer.</p> <p>9.2. The Member<u>Councillor</u>, or their representative, will be given the opportunity to sum up their case.</p>
10. Consultation with the Independent Person
<p>10.1. Prior to the consultation, the Independent Person may seek a short adjournment of the hearing to prepare/ finalise their view on whether, <u>in their view</u>, a breach of the Code of Conduct has occurred.</p> <p>10.2. The hearing will then be reconvened and Members of the Sub-Committee must consult the Independent Person on whether in his/ her opinion a breach has occurred. This view must be taken into account by the Sub-Committee before it makes its decision on an allegation.</p>
11. The Members of Sub-Committee will deliberate in private session to consider evidence presented and to reach their decision (the Legal Adviser will attend)
12. Decision
<p>12.1. Upon the Sub-Committee's return the Chairman will announce the Sub-Committee's decision in the following terms:-</p> <p>12.1.1. The Sub-Committee decides that <u>there is no breach</u> the Member has not failed to follow to f the Code of Conduct; or</p> <p>12.1.2. The Sub-Committee decides that <u>there is a breach</u> the Member has failed to follow of the Code of Conduct;</p> <p>12.2 The Sub-Committee will give reasons for its decision.</p> <p>12.3 If the Sub-Committee decides that the re is no breach of Member has not failed to follow the Code of Conduct the Chairman closes the hearing. <u>The case is at an end.</u></p> <p>12.4 If the Sub-Committee decides that the Member<u>Councillor</u> has <u>breached</u> failed to follow the Code of Conduct, it will consider any representations from the Investigating Officer and/or the Member<u>Councillor</u> and will seek the views of the Independent Person as to:</p> <p>12.4.1 Whether any action should be taken; and</p> <p>12.4.2 If so, what form any action (in the form of a sanction) should take.</p> <p>12.5 As part of their role under 12.4.2, the Sub-Committee will consider whether to impose any of the following sanctions:</p> <p>12.5.1 Publish its findings in respect of the Member<u>Councillor</u>'s conduct (e.g. in a local newspaper in print or on-line or both). [Note that any decision will</p>

normally be made available for inspection and published on the Council's website in the event that the hearing was held in public];

- 12.5.2 Report its findings to Council (or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council) for information;
 - 12.5.3 Report its findings and recommend to Council (or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council) that the MemberCouncillor be issued with a formal censure or be reprimanded;
 - 12.5.4 Recommend to the MemberCouncillor's Group Leader (or in the case of ungrouped MemberCouncillors, recommend to Council or to Committees) that the MemberCouncillor be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council;
 - 12.5.5 Recommend to the Leader of the Council that the MemberCouncillor be removed from the Cabinet, or removed from particular Executive Member responsibilities;
 - 12.5.6 Instruct the Monitoring Officer to arrange (or recommend that the Parish/ Town/ Community Council should arrange) training for the MemberCouncillor;
 - 12.5.7 Recommend to Council (or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council) that the MemberCouncillor be removed from all outside appointments to which they have been appointed or nominated by the authority;
 - 12.5.8 Recommend to Council (or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council) that it withdraws facilities provided to the MemberCouncillor by the Council, such as a computer, website and/or email ~~and internet access be withdrawn~~;
 - 12.5.9 Recommend to Council (or the Parish/ Town/ Community Council) that the MemberCouncillor be excluded from the Council's Offices or other premises, with the exception of meeting rooms as necessary for attending Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings; or
 - 12.5.10 Take no further action.
- 12.6 [NOTE: The Sub-Committee has no power to suspend or disqualify the MemberCouncillor or to withdraw MemberCouncillor's' basic or special responsibility allowances or any other payment made to the Councillor that they are entitled to under legislation]
- 12.7 The Members of Sub-Committee must then deliberate in private to consider what action, if any, should be taken (the Legal Adviser will attend).
- 12.8 On the Sub-Committee's return the Chairman must announce the Sub-Committee's decision (in relation to a Parish / Town/ Community MemberCouncillor, a recommendation to the Parish / Town/ Community Council). The Chairman will

confirm whether and if so, what sanctions will be applied and the reasons for this decision.

12.9 The Sub-Committee must consider whether it should make any recommendations to the Council or in relation to a Parish / Town/ Community ~~Member~~Councillor to the Parish / Town/ Community Council, with a view to promoting high standards of conduct among its ~~Member~~Councillors.

12.10 The Chairman will confirm that a full written decision will be issued within 7 working days following the hearing and that the Sub-Committee's minutes will be published. The hearing will then be closed.

ROLE OF INDEPENDENT PERSON AND RESERVE INDEPENDENT PERSONS – NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ROLE DESCRIPTION

Appointed by: The Council

Liaison with: Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer(s), Members of the Standards Committee, officers, ~~and members of the~~ District Councillors, and Town, ~~and~~ Parish and Community Councillors within the district, key stakeholders within the community.

Reference to the IP includes the Independent Person and Reserve Independent Persons (except number 8 which is just the Reserve IP). The role is:

1. To assist the Council in promoting high standards of conduct by elected and co-opted MemberCouncillors of North Hertfordshire District Council and Parish/Town/ Community Councillors and in particular to uphold the Code of Conduct adopted by the Council and underpinned by ~~and~~ the seven principles of public life, namely selflessness, honesty, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness and leadership.
2. To assist the Council by acting as advocate and ambassador in promoting ethical behaviour and by developing a sound understanding of the ethical framework as it operates within North Hertfordshire District Council and its local councils.
3. To be available for ad hoc consultation by the Monitoring Officer where the Monitoring Officer is dealing with a matter that has not reached the stage of a formal complaint.
4. To be available for consultations on ~~preliminary~~ assessment of a complaint with the Monitoring Officer
5. To be available for consultation by the Monitoring Officer and/or the Standards Committee before a decision is taken as to whether to investigate a complaint or to seek local resolution of the same.
6. To be consulted by the Council through the Monitoring Officer and/or the Standards Committee before it makes a decision on an allegation that has been investigated and to be available to attend meetings of the Standards Committee in a non-voting advisory capacity.
7. To if attending a CMH FDH meeting of the Standards Sub- Committee and an FDH meeting to confirm the IP's views as to whether a breach of the Code of Conduct has occurred and any subsequent penalty (which will be taken into account).
8. To be available for consultation by any MemberCouncillor, including Parish/Town or Community Councillor. This may be on an ad hoc basis for views on the Complaints Procedure or process as pre-arranged between the parties, either by telephone, on-line or at the Council's offices. It is not the role of the IP to act as advocate for the Councillor who is subject to the complaint, to negotiate complaint matters, or to provide substantive advice (legal or otherwise) on the allegations themselves. This will generally be confidential between the

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~~MemberCouncillor~~ and IP, unless ~~there~~ the ~~MemberCouncillor~~ confirms they have acted illegally or has a complaint about the Procedure. This will then be confirmed to the Monitoring Officer.

9. To participate in training events to develop skills, knowledge, and experience and in any networks developed for Independent Persons operating outside the District Council's area. To share information and promote debate and discussion amongst the Standards Committee following such training. To attend training events organised and promoted by the Council's Standards Committee and Monitoring Officer.
10. To attend quarterly liaison meetings with the Monitoring Officer, Chair and Vice Chair of Standards Committee, to consider standards matters generally, including although not limited to the review of relevant complaints handling documents, guidance and processes.

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