



# **Annual Report 2016/17**

## **Report of the Standards Committee**

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## **Foreword by the Chairman**

I am pleased to report that the Kent Model Code of Conduct and associated arrangements continue to work well.

I would like to thank the Monitoring Officer and his Deputy for all their hard work during 2016/17. I am also extremely grateful to Bernard Dowley, the Independent Person, and Andrew Hayes, his substitute, who have fulfilled their roles over the last four years with enthusiasm and professionalism.

I am pleased to commend this Annual Report of the Standards Committee to the Council.

**Councillor Bernard Butcher**  
Chairman of the Standards Committee

## **Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer Statement**

The **Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework** (2016 Edition) identifies seven core principles of good governance, with associated sub principles. Of particular relevance are:

**Core Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law**

**Sub Principle: Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values**

**Core Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability**

**Sub Principle: Implementing good practices in reporting**

This report summarises the achievements of the Standards Committee of Dover District against its Terms of Reference for the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. This report also contributes to the Council's achievement of the required core and sub principles detailed above.

Therefore, as the Monitoring Officer, I am satisfied that the Standards Committee has operated effectively and delivered its functions as outlined in its Terms of Reference.

I am very grateful to Harvey Rudd, the Deputy Monitoring Officer; Sue Carr, the Complaints and Corporate Resilience Officer, and Rebecca Brough and the Democratic Support team. I am also very grateful to Bernard Dowley, the Independent Person, and Andrew Hayes, the Substitute Independent Person, whose appointments will expire in June 2017. Their support and assistance over the last four years has been invaluable. The recruitment process for their replacements is underway, and Council will be asked to appoint the new Independent Person and his substitute in July 2017.

**David Randall**

Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer

# **The Role of the Standards Committee**

## **ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 2.1 The primary responsibility of the Standards Committee is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct amongst the 45 members of Dover District Council and (up to) 317 members of Town and Parish Councils in the District.
- 2.2 The principal functions of the Standards Committee are as follows:
- To promote and maintain high standards of conduct by District Councillors, Town and Parish Councillors and Co-Opted Members.
  - To advise the District Council on the adoption of or revisions to its Code of Conduct.
  - To monitor the effectiveness of the Code of Conduct and to review and manage the arrangements for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints.
  - To maintain oversight of the District Council's arrangements for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints.
  - To monitor complaints handling and Ombudsman investigations and to make payments or provide other benefits in cases of maladministration.
  - To advise, train or arrange to train District Members, Co-opted Members and Town and Parish Councillors on matters relating to the Code of Conduct.
  - To act as an advisory body in respect of any ethical governance matter and to advise on local ethical governance protocols and procedures.
  - To appoint a Hearing Panel to deal with Code of Conduct complaints, following investigation.
  - To deal with any alleged breaches by Members of local protocols adopted by the Council including the Protocol for Good Practice in Planning Procedure and the Protocol for Officers and Members for Dealing with Conflicts of Interest of Councillors in Professional Practice.

## **CODES AND PROTOCOLS**

- 2.3 In addition to the above, the work of the Standards Committee also impinges upon the following codes and protocols of Dover District Council:
- Members' Kent Model Code of Conduct
  - Members' Protocol for Good Practice in Planning Procedures
  - Protocol for Relationships between Members and Officers of a Local Authority
  - Protocol for Officers and Members for Dealing with Conflicts of Interest of Councillors in Professional Practice

## **MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE**

2.4 The Standards Committee is a group appointed by the Council to help maintain and promote high ethical standards in both the District Council and Town and Parish Councils in the District. The Committee comprises seven District Councillors.

2.5 The membership of the Standards Committee for 2016/17 was as follows:

Councillor B W Butcher	Councillor S S Chandler
Councillor M R Eddy	Councillor P J Hawkins
Councillor S M Le Chevalier	Councillor S C Manion
Councillor K Mills	

*The Standards Committee can only draw substitute District Councillors from the pool of named substitutes appointed by Council.*

## **OFFICERS WHO SUPPORT THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

2.6 The Standards Committee receives support from the Monitoring Officer (Director of Governance), the Solicitor to the Council (who is also the Deputy Monitoring Officer) and the Complaints and Corporate Resilience Officer. In addition, Democratic Support Officers support the Standards Committee and the activities of the Monitoring Officer as necessary.

2.7 The Monitoring Officer is a statutory appointment whose responsibility is to ensure the lawfulness and fairness of Council decision-making. The Monitoring Officer serves as the guardian of the Council's Constitution and ethical standards. As part of this the Monitoring Officer works closely with the Standards Committee to assist it in the role of promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct amongst Members of the District Council and Town and Parish Councils in the District.

## **STANDARDS ARRANGEMENTS**

2.8 This Council adopted the Kent Model Code of Conduct on 26 June 2012 which prescribes the conduct that is expected of Members and co-opted Members of the authority when acting in that capacity. Provisions relating to registration and disclosure of pecuniary interests are included in the Code, with failure to register a pecuniary interest within 28 days of election or becoming aware of the interest being a criminal offence. The Code is also consistent with Nolan's Seven Principles of Public Life, i.e. selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. Under the regulations, the Monitoring Officer is required to establish and maintain a register of interests of Members and co-opted Members of the local authority and parishes in the authority's area.

2.9 Following the abolition of Standards for England on 31 March 2012, this authority assumed responsibility for dealing with and investigating all complaints relating to breaches of the Code, including those made against Parish Councillors in this district. Specific responsibility for assessing alleged breaches of the Code rests with the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person (appointed by Council on 25 June 2012). The Monitoring Officer is able to consider whether the complaint can be resolved informally at any stage. However, if the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person, considers that the complaint merits investigation, he will appoint an investigation officer to undertake the investigation. Once the investigation has concluded, the Monitoring Officer may

consider that informal resolution is appropriate. Alternatively, he may convene a meeting of the Hearing Panel (comprising members of the Standards Committee) to determine the outcome of the complaint. The range of sanctions that can be applied is limited, and the Hearing Panel has no powers to suspend or disqualify or to withdraw the allowances of the Member who is the subject of the complaint.

- 2.10 When adopting the new Code of Conduct, the Council requested that the Code and associated arrangements be kept under review. A working group of the Association of Kent Secretaries was established for this purpose.
- 2.11 Following adoption by Council, revisions were made to the Code in January 2014. These included the amendment of the definitions of 'Associated Person' and 'Member'. More significantly, the group also recommended that Members should be able to declare interests which are not financial or regulatory in nature in accordance with Nolan's Seven Principles of Public Life. This latter recommendation was made partly because, during the first year of operation of the new arrangements, a significant number of Members had, on several occasions, felt the need to make disclosures at meetings in the interests of transparency, even though these did not fall into the Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Other Significant Interest classifications. Council duly adopted these changes and the Code now makes provision for Members to make a Voluntary Announcement of Other Interests.
- 2.12 Further revisions were made to the arrangements (but not the Code) in July 2015. These included the introduction of a pre-hearing procedure, and provision for the Monitoring Officer to participate in hearings. In addition, the requirement to publish the Monitoring Officer's initial decision on whether to take action on a complaint was removed.

## **2016/17 ACTIVITIES**

### **(a) Corporate Complaints**

- 2.13 The Standards Committee has a responsibility to oversee the Council's corporate complaints procedures. The period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 has seen 104 corporate complaints received by the Council, two fewer than the preceding financial year.
- 2.14 The Local Government Ombudsman issued 7 decisions regarding complaints made against the Council during the 2016/17 municipal year, none of which were upheld. This compares to 13 complaints received in 2015/16, with one upheld. Data relating to the municipal year 2016/17 will be available from the Local Government Ombudsman in due course and reported to the Governance Committee.

### **(b) Training**

- 2.15 No training was undertaken during the period 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017.

### **(c) Dispensations**

- 2.16 Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011 gives powers to the Monitoring Officer to grant dispensation to Members with a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest to participate in discussions and to vote. There were no requests for dispensation to the Standards Committee during 2016/17.

(d) **Consultation**

- 2.17 The Standards Committee considered no consultations during the municipal year 2016/17.

**2017/18 ACTIVITIES**

- 3.1 At its meeting on 17 May 2017, Council will consider a proposal to no longer appoint a separate Standards Committee. The functions of the Standards Committee will be transferred to the Governance Committee, including responsibility for monitoring service complaints, promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Members of the District Council and managing the arrangements for Code of Conduct complaints.

## **Local Assessment of Complaints**

- 3.1 The Localism Act 2011 represented a sea-change in the way that complaints are assessed by the Council, replacing the two sub-committees (Initial Assessment and Review) with a decision by the Monitoring Officer, taken in consultation with the Independent Person during a consideration meeting which is held in private. Should the Monitoring Officer decide that further investigation is required, an Investigating Officer will be appointed. Where the investigation finds evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, the Monitoring Officer can decide to take no action, seek informal resolution or refer the matter for consideration by a Hearing Panel.
- 3.2 The following information contains no details of the names of elected or co-opted members about whom complaints have been made, and is intended for use as a summary of activities only.

### **Complaints against Elected or Co-opted Members**

- 3.3 The municipal year 2016/17 saw the Monitoring Officer receive 13 complaints. For comparison, the Monitoring Officer received 8 complaints during 2015/16. The Standards Committee Hearing Panel did not meet during 2016/17.
- 3.4 The 13 complaints received in 2016/17 related to members at four authorities.

