
Update on Ethical Matters – Quarter 3 of 2015/16 - Summary Report

Committee considering report:	Governance and Ethics Committee
Date of Committee:	Governance and Ethics Committee on 8 February 2016
Lead Member:	Quentin Webb
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	N/A
Report Author:	David Holling
Forward Plan Ref:	GE3032

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide an update on local and national issues relating to ethical standards and to bring to the attention of the Committee any complaints or other problems within West Berkshire.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Members of the Governance and Ethics Committee are asked to note the report.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Financial:** There are no financial issues arising from this report. All costs associated with the investigation of complaints are met from within existing budgets.
- 3.2 **Policy:** Revised policy and changes to processes adopted at Council in December 2013
- 3.3 **Personnel:** There are no personnel issues associated with this report
- 3.4 **Legal:** There are no legal issues arising from this report, The matters covered by this report are generally requirements of the Localism Act 2011 and regulations made under it.
- 3.5 **Risk Management:** The benefits of this process are the maintenance of the Council's credibility and good governance by a high standard of ethical behaviour. The threats are the loss of credibility of the Council if standards fall.
- 3.6 **Property:** None
- 3.7 **Other:** None

4. Other options considered

- 4.1 None

5. Executive Summary

6. Introduction

- 6.1 Following the introduction of the Localism Act 2011 it was agreed that quarterly reports would be provided to the Governance and Ethics Committee. This report sets out the number and nature of standards complaints received, progress made with complaints submitted and highlights any areas where training or other action might avoid further complaints in the future.

7. Key Issues Identified in the report:

- 7.1 During Quarter 3 of 2015/16 one formal complaint was received by the Monitoring Officer. Following the initial assessment by the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person, no further action was taken on the complaint (NPC5/15)
- 7.2 The investigation into a complaint against a parish councillor (NPC4/15) has been completed and will be discussed at an Advisory Panel meeting on the 11th February 2016. The Advisory Panel will make a recommendation to the Governance and Ethics Committee.
- 7.3 Dispensations were granted to seven Members in relation to the A339/ Fleming Road Junction Compulsory Purchase Order during Quarter 3 of 2015/16 and a further two dispensations were granted in January 2016 in relation to the same matter.
- 7.4 A dispensation was also granted to all Members present at the December 2015 Council meeting to discuss matters pertaining to Council Tax.
- 7.5 The number of declarations of gifts and hospitality by District Councillors increased significantly during Quarter 3 of 2015/16. This could be as a result of the annual reminder sent out before the Christmas period by the Monitoring Officer.
- 7.6 No training has been undertaken during this period and the next session would take place before the District parish Conference on the 22 March 2016.
- 7.7 A task group has been set up to review the Code of Conduct and will report back to the April 2016 meeting.

8. Conclusion

- 1.1 The number of complaints against District Councillors has decreased substantially in Quarter 3. However, Officers have received a further four initial enquiries which the complainant has decided not to pursue during this period.
- 8.1 It is of concern that a large number of Parishes have still provide details of Declarations of Interest in accordance with the Localism Act in order that this Council as responsible authority can ensure that relevant details are provided for the public to ensure transparency. The Monitoring Officer has written again to the parishes on the 18th January 2016 to reminded Clerks of their obligations.

9. Appendices

Appendix A - Supporting Information