

Audit Committee, 16 March 2016

Information Bulletin

Code of Conduct Complaints

1. Since November 2015, when the Committee was last updated on complaints alleging breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct, there have been a further four complaints received by the Monitoring Officer. This gives a total of sixteen complaints since the current arrangements prescribed by the Localism Act 2011 were introduced in July 2012.
2. Of the four complaints received recently, the Monitoring Officer decided that in three cases (which related to one incident) the councillor was not acting in their official capacity at the time and so the Code of Conduct was not applicable; and the behaviour alleged in the other case was not sufficiently serious to warrant further action. Each case was discussed with an Independent Person before a conclusion was reached, as required by the legislation and the Council's local procedures. The complainants were all informed of the decision. Details are as follows:
 - a) It was alleged by three complainants that Councillor A had failed to treat others with respect during a Radio Suffolk interview. The interview related to the withdrawal by a Church of permission to screen the "Rocky Horror Picture Show" in their premises. Having listened to a recording of the interview, it was clear that Councillor A was being interviewed as a member of the congregation and not as a councillor. The Monitoring Officer's opinion was that the Code of Conduct was not engaged at that point.
 - b) In the fourth complaint it was alleged that Councillor B had failed to treat a person with respect, by asking them in an e-mail not to contact him again. The member of the public was not a constituent. The e-mail was firm but polite. The Monitoring Officer decided that the matter was insufficiently serious to warrant action being taken.

Independent Persons

3. In March 2015, a training session will be provided to the Independent Persons, alongside the individuals appointed by other Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire councils. The event will involve discussion of a number of case studies, and will be an opportunity for the Independent Persons to discuss their approach with colleagues.

Committee on Standards in Public Life

4. The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) has published a new online guide for providers of public services – whether outsourced or in-house – to promote high ethical standards. The guide follows up on the earlier report by

the CSPL which established the importance of common standards for all those delivering public services. The guide is available here –

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/481535/6.1291_CO_LAL_Ethical_standards_of_public_life_report_Interactive_2_.pdf

5. The CSPL is clear from its research that the public want all providers of public services, regardless of whether they are from the public, private or voluntary sectors, to adhere to and operate by common ethical standards. To the public, “how” things are done is as important as “what” is done.
6. The CSPL recognises the challenges faced by organisations, large or small, in ensuring that all their employees abide by high ethical standards. The report provides some examples of how commissioners and providers have sought to build high ethical standards.
7. Councillor Bond made reference to the need to maintain ethical standards in his Annual Report to Council in December 2015.

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