

## **Report to Standards Committee**

**Subject:** Review of Standards Regime

**Date:** 25 February 2016

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### **1. Purpose of the Report**

To seek approval to set up a series of working groups to review various aspects of the current standards regime.

### **2. Background**

- 2.1 Members will recall that the Localism Act 2011 made fundamental changes to the system of regulation of standards of conduct for elected and co-opted Councillors. The Act repealed certain provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, which provided the basis for the previous statutory standards regime, abolished Standards for England and required the Council to introduce a new regime.
- 2.2 When introducing the new regime in 2012, Standards Committee set up a series of working groups to look at various aspects of the Act and report back to the Committee. The Standards Committee then made a number of recommendations to Council.
- 2.3 The Council met on 11 July 2012 and approved all the recommendations made by the Standards Committee. In particular, Council:
  - a) agreed to set up a Standards Committee which is not politically balanced;
  - b) agreed that the Standards Committee should consist of 2 representatives from each political group together with 3 co-opted non-voting Members (1 Independent and 2 Parish reps);
  - c) agreed that Sub-Committees of the Standard Committee (“Hearing Panels”) consisting of 1 representative from each political group and 1 co-opted non-voting Member would deal with decisions on allegations following an investigation;
  - d) gave delegated power to the Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer to constitute the membership of the Hearings Panels at any time;
  - e) approved the remit of the Standards Committee and Hearing Panels;
  - f) approved the Code of Conduct and arrangements for dealing with complaints;

- g) agreed that the Council should have an Independent Person and reserve candidate and approved the appointment of Mr J R Baggaley as Independent Person for a period of 5 years;
  - h) agreed that the Independent Person be paid a fixed fee retainer of £500 per year with a fee of £100 per allegation which is subject to an investigation;
  - i) appointed the Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer as the proper officer for the receipt of a written request for a dispensation;
  - j) agreed the delegations approved by the Standards Committee for dealing with dispensations;
  - k) requested that the Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer prepare and maintain a new Register of Members Interests to comply with the requirements of the Act and the Council's Code of Conduct; and
  - l) requested that the Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer prepare and maintain new Register of Members' Interests for each Parish Council to comply with the Act and any Code of Conduct adopted by each Parish Council.
- 2.4 The regime approved in 2012 has continued unchanged and it is now prudent to review it to confirm that it remains fit for purpose.

### **3. Proposal**

- 3.1 It is proposed that the following working groups are set up to review various aspects of the current regime and report back to Standards Committee. This worked well in 2012 therefore it is suggested that the same approach is taken for the review.

Working Group A – Standards Committee and Independent Persons(s)

Working Group B – Registration of Interests and Code of Conduct

Working Group C – Arrangements for dealing with complaints and Dispensations

### **4. Resource Implications**

None.

### **5. Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Committee agrees to set up a series of working groups to review various aspects of the current standards regime.

### **6. Appendices**

None.