



East
Northamptonshire
Council

Joint Standards Complaints Committee – 19 June 2013

Activity report of the Monitoring Officer

Purpose of report: This regular report provides a brief update on Monitoring Officer activity in relation to the Standards Framework in the period January to June 2013

Attachment(s)

Appendix A - Summary of Register of Interest Responses by Parish and Town Councillors.

1.0 Registers of Interests

- 1.1 At the time of writing this report there has been a 94% return of Registers of Interest for Town and Parish Councillors (306 registers received from a possible 326). Benchmarking with other Monitoring Officers indicates that this is a very high level of response. Some of the non-returned Registers may relate to vacancies on Councils, not all of which are immediately notified to ENC. We are aware of 25 vacancies in Town and Parish Councils around the District at present.
- 1.2 Efforts to increase compliance will now focus on the two Parish Councils with significant levels of non-return of registers. The Monitoring Officer proposes to contact the Chairman of both Deene and Twywell Parish Councils and ask permission to attend their next meeting to discuss the matter further with the relevant Councillors.

2.0 Code of Conduct

- 2.1 All Town and Parish Councils in the District have now reported that they have adopted a code of conduct. This information has been published on the ENC website, together with a copy of the NALC Code, which five Parish Councils have adopted.

3.0 Monitoring Officer Enquiries

- 3.1 Since this Committee last met on 30 January 2013 the Monitoring Officer has received 12 enquiries, mostly in relation to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests. The slight drop in enquiry levels indicates that the new framework is now embedded in most Councils.

4.0 Dispensations

- 4.1 No requests for dispensations have been received since the last report.

5.0 Complaints

- 5.1 Since the new arrangements were put in place, four complaints have been assessed under the new process. The first complaint was against a Town Councillor alleging failure to declare a prejudicial interest under the old Code. This had been referred for investigation under the former arrangements and therefore the complaint could be determined under the new process. The investigation found there was no case to answer in relation to a failure to comply with the Code. The Councillor, complainant and Town Council have been notified of this outcome.
- 5.2 The next complaint was in relation to a District Councillor. The Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the JSCC and Independent Person, decided that no further action would be taken. The complainant was informed of these decisions.
- 5.3 The third complaint was in relation to a Parish Councillor. The Monitoring Officer, in

consultation with the Vice-Chairman of the JSCC and Independent Person, decided that 'other action' was the most appropriate course of action and this is currently being progressed. The complainant and Councillor have been notified of this and the Parish Council will be notified when the action is complete.

- 5.4 The final complaint was received recently in relation to a District Councillor. This related to an event which took place before 1 July 2012 and therefore it was not possible for the complaint to be processed under the current arrangements. The complainant was notified of this by the Deputy Monitoring Officer.

6.0 Independent Person

- 6.1 Council confirmed the appointment of Mr Andrew Sortwell as the Reserve Independent Person in April 2013 following an interview with a panel of JSCC Members. Mr Sortwell worked as Director for Children and Young People at the County Council some years ago and currently works as an educational consultant in the UK and abroad. He lives in the District. The Monitoring Officer has delivered induction training to Mr Sortwell.

- 6.2 Both the Independent Person and Reserve were able to attend an Independent Persons Workshop delivered by Hoey Ainscough Associates and organised by the Northants Monitoring Officers Group. The workshop included presentations on the related legislation and role of the Independent Person together with discussions of case scenarios.

- 6.3 The Independent Person subsequently reported back to the Monitoring Officer that the majority of the recommendations for best practice made at the workshop are already in place within East Northamptonshire and defined within the complaints process. However the following issues have also been identified for action:

- Consider if there was a role for the Independent Person in giving advice to complainants or assisting in the promoting of high standards of conduct at Town and Parish Councils.
- Where the Monitoring Officer does not agree with the view of the Independent Person, the reasons should be recorded in the decision notice.
- Drafting and signing a Confidentiality Agreement for the Independent Person and Reserve and checking of Indemnity Insurance position.
- Increasing understanding and visibility of the role, and the assurance it provides, by having a profile of the Independent Person and Reserve and their role on the Council's website under the standards arrangements.

- 6.4 One final area of concern raised by the training was that of the relationship between the Independent Person and the Monitoring Officer, who will be the key contact from the Council. In order to provide an additional source of information for the Independent Person and Reserve, a subscription to the Standards Exchange.co.uk website has been taken out for a trial year. (The subscription also provides access for the Monitoring Officer).

7.0 Standards Training for New Councillors

- 7.1 Given the turnover noted in 1.1 above, a training session aimed at new Councillors has been arranged on Monday 15 July at East Northamptonshire Council. The session will start at 7pm in the Council Chamber and is also open to all Councillors and Clerks.

8.0 Equality and diversity issues

- 8.1 There are no known negative equality and diversity issues arising from this paper.

9.0 Legal implications

9.1 This report outlines activities undertaken under local arrangements which reflect the Localism Act 2011 and related regulations.

10.0 Risk management

10.1 The actions reported reduce the risk of non-compliance with legislation, particularly the duty to promote high standards of conduct by Councillors.

11.0 Financial implications

11.1 There are no known additional financial implications arising from this report.

12.0 Corporate outcomes

12.1 The work reported here contributes to the Corporate Outcomes of Effective Management and Strong Community Leadership

13.0 Recommendations

13.1 Members are recommended to note the contents of this report.

Legal	Power: Localism Act 2011				
	Other considerations: Constitution				
Background Papers:					
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Date: 5/6/13					
CFO		MO		CX	

(Committee Report Normal Rev. 22)

Appendix A

Registers of Interest Received by the Monitoring Officer 5 June 2013.

<i>Council</i>	<i>Number Received/ Number Expected</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Aldwincle	7/7	
Ashton	6/6	
Barnwell	7/7	
Benefield	6/6	
Brigstock	11/11	
Bulwick	4/4	
Chelveston	7/7	
Collyweston	4/4	
Deene	1/4	Monitoring Officer to Contact Chairman
Denford	4/6	
Duddington	7/7	
Easton	10/10	
Glapthorn	7/7	
Great Addington	7/7	
Hargrave	6/6	
Harringworth	6/7	
Hemington	9/9	
Higham	16/16	
Irthlingborough	10/10	
Islip	7/7	
Kings Cliffe	11/11	
Lilford	3/4	
Little Addington	5/5	
Lowick	5/5	
Lutton	4/4	
Nassington	8/9	
Oundle	14/14	
Pilton	7/8	
Polebrook	7/7	
Raunds	11/13	
Ringstead	8/9	
Rushden	18/20	
Stanwick	6/7	
Sudborough	5/5	
Thrapston	13/13	
Titchmarsh	9/9	
Twywell	0/5	Monitoring Officer to Contact Chairman
Warmington	4/6	
Woodford	10/10	
Woodnewton	7/7	
Yarwell	7/7	