Purpose of report
This regular report provides a brief update on Monitoring Officer activity since the last meeting of the Committee.

1.0 Monitoring Officer Enquiries and Complaints

1.1 Since the last meeting of this Committee on 16 October 2019 there have continued to be enquiries in relation to Members’ declarations of interest and parish council governance and advice. Responses to queries from East Northamptonshire Council (ENC) members were undertaken by the Interim Monitoring Officer until 20 December 2019, and since then by Bhupinder Gill, our new Monitoring Officer. Ben Smith, as Deputy Monitoring Officer, has picked up any queries from Town and Parish Councils.

1.2 There has been one new Code of Conduct complaint since the last meeting which is currently subject to initial assessment.

1.3 The Register of Interests for both ENC Members and its Town and Parish Council Members are kept up to date and changes are made to the website as required for both.

2.0 Councillor Turnover and Training

2.1 No training has been delivered since the last Committee meeting and over the autumn months but one to one advice has been provided to members by the Interim Monitoring Officer and new Monitoring Officer as required.

2.2 Two new councillors were elected to ENC on 12 December 2019; Herbert Jackson and Peter Tomas were elected for the Higham Ferrers Lancaster and Chichele wards respectively.

2.3 It should be noted that the passage of the Structural Change Order through Parliament is expected to be completed by the end of February 2020, with the new Unitary Councils not starting to deliver services until 1 April 2021. Detailed planning for the expected elections to the Shadow Councils in May 2020 is now being undertaken. The requirement for Induction Training for these new Councillors is included in the programme for creation of the new Unitary Councils as the Monitoring Officers for the new Councils are not expected to be appointed until late 2020.

2.4 In respect of town and parish councillors, the Deputy Monitoring Officer attended a meeting with the Town Clerks on the 23 January 2020 and gave advice on preparing for the period of purdah leading up to the May elections; a town and parish briefing for which will be circulated shortly. Initial discussions were also held regarding Code of Conduct training for newly elected town and parish councillors following the May elections.
3.0 Request for Dispensations

3.1 Five of the eleven Easton on the Hill Parish Councillors have requested dispensation to be able to speak on and make decisions in relation to allotments owned by the Parish Council. Each has a disclosable pecuniary interest as either a renter of an allotment plot themselves, or the spouse of a renter of a plot.

3.2 The request is based on the fact that without a dispensation the number of councillors prohibited from speaking on this matter would be so great that the council’s business would be impeded.

3.3 The five Councillors requesting dispensation are as follows:

- Cllr Emma Hanson;
- Cllr Daphne Sharpe;
- Cllr Ian Forman;
- Cllr John Ward; and
- Cllr Patsy Bates

3.4 The dispensation is requested through to 11 May 2020, following which newly elected councillors will take up office following ordinary parish council elections.

4.0 Committee for Standards in Public Life – Local Government Ethical Standards

4.1 There continues to be discussion about changes to the existing regime and, following the consultation conducted last year by the Committee for Standards in Public Life, changes are anticipated. Hoey Ainscough have been appointed to work on a draft Code and are working with Wilkin Chapman Solicitors to produce a draft.

4.2 Recently three workshops were hosted at the Local Government Association (LGA) to discuss the content of the new code. Attendees included representation from Lawyers in Local Government, the LGA, Town and Parish Councils, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC).

It is hoped that a draft Code will be produced for consultation in the Spring.

5.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

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

6.0 Privacy Impact Implications

6.1 There are no privacy implications arising from this report.

7.0 Legal Implications

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

8.0 Risk Management

8.1 The preparation of this report enables the Committee to maintain an overview of the standards regime and reduced the risk of non-compliance with legislation.
9.0 Resource and Financial Implications

9.1 There are no new financial or resource implications arising from this report.

10.0 Constitutional Implications

10.1 There are no constitutional implications arising from this report.

11.0 Implications for our Customers

11.1 There are no obvious new implications on customers as a result of this report.

12.0 Corporate Outcomes

12.1 The work reported here contributes to the Corporate Outcome of Effective Management.

13.0 Recommendations

13.1 The Committee is recommended to:

   a) Note the contents of this report in terms of monitoring of complaint and other activity.

      [Reason: To demonstrate active monitoring of the local ethical standards position.]

   b) Agree that a dispensation be granted under S33 (2)(c) of the Localism Act to Cllrs Emma Hanson, Daphne Sharpe, Ian Forman, John Ward and Patsy Bates of Easton on the Hill Parish Council, until the end of 11 May 2020 to enable their involvement in Parish Council discussions and decisions relating to the management of Easton on the Hill allotments, unless these discussions involve any changes in rights, responsibilities or charges for the use of the allotments in which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest.

      [Reason: To allow the councillors to represent their community on issues of wider community concern in relation to the Parish Council’s management of these spaces whilst acknowledging the personal interest they have in part of the space.]