

Report to: **Standards Committee**

Date: **12th October 2023**

Report Author: **Executive Director (Legal & Democratic Services)**

Title of Report: **Standards Review 2022/23**

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report provides Committee with a summary of standards matters relating to 2022/23.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Committee notes this report.

3. Background and Reasons for Recommendations

Complaints

3.1 Until 2021/22 the Council had received a very low level of complaints about councillor conduct for many years, with no more than one or two complaints being referred to the Standards Assessment Panel annually, and none being referred for formal investigation for around 10 years. There was a marked increase in the number of conduct complaints in 2021/22, when 10 complaints were referred to the Standards Assessment Panel. A further 6 complaints were referred to the Assessment Panel in 2022/23.

3.2 Councillors will recall that the Standards Assessment Panel may make one of the following findings in respect of the complaints it considers:

- i) no action needed; or
- ii) referral for informal resolution by the Monitoring Officer; or
- iii) referral for formal investigation.

3.3 A summary of the way those complaints were dealt with is set out below. The complaints referred for formal investigation were referred to an external investigator.

2021/22

No.	Assessment Decision	Panel	Complainant	Outcome
1	Formal Investigation	councillor		No breach found
2	Formal Investigation	councillor		No breach found
3	Formal Investigation	councillor		No breach found
4	Formal Investigation	councillor		No breach found
5	Formal Investigation	councillor		No breach found
6	Formal Investigation	HBC employee		No breach found
7	Formal Investigation	HBC employee		Breach found
8	Formal Investigation	member of public		Complaint withdrawn by complainant
9	Formal Investigation	member of public		Complaint withdrawn by complainant
10	Not applicable	member of public		Ceased to be councillor before determined

2022/23

No.	Assessment Decision	Panel	Complainant	Outcome
1	Not taken to Panel	councillor		Ceased to be a councillor before determined
2	Withdrawn before Panel	councillor		Withdrawn before Panel
3	Informal resolution by MO	member of public		N/A – advice given
4	Informal resolution by MO	councillor		N/A – advice given
5	Informal resolution by MO	councillor		N/A – advice given
6	Informal resolution by MO	councillor		N/A – advice given

In addition, in 2022/23 a further complaint was received from one councillor about another and which the monitoring officer determined to be suitable for informal resolution. This complaint was therefore not referred to the Assessment Panel.

2023/24

No complaints have been referred to the Assessment Panel since 1st April 2023.

Member Training

3.4 Code of conduct training is run annually and is usually delivered in-house by the Executive Director (Legal & Democratic Services) who is the Council's monitoring officer. In recent years, attendance has been as follows:

Year	Number of sessions	Number attending	% of councillors attending
2022	2 all via Teams	13	37%
2023	3 all in person	19	54%

The attendance rate at standards training remains disappointingly low. Two further "mopping up" sessions are to be held in October and November via teams and Group leaders have been asked to encourage attendance by those who have yet to attend standards training this year.

In addition:

- A code of conduct briefing was given to new councillors by the monitoring officer as part of the Council's induction programme in May 2022 and May 2023; and
- A code of conduct training session was delivered to Altham Parish councillors by the monitoring officer in September 2023;
- One of the "independent persons" appointed by Standards Committee attended external training in June 2022 and all three of our independent persons attended external training in September 2023;
- Standards Committee received training in December 2022 in respect of the Council's procedures for determining complaints;

- The Council is looking to promote member training generally and is arranging for its Learning & Development Panel to meet in October (having not met for several years) to consider member training needs and barriers to members training amongst other things, with a view to potentially regaining Member Development Charter accreditation.

Other Matters

3.5 The Council's procedures for handling complaints about councillors were reviewed in the light of our experience of dealing with the increased number of complaints in recent years and, in particular, the increase in the number of complaints referred for investigation and potential hearing before the Standards Committee. The updated procedures were approved at the Council's AGM in May 2023 and, whilst remaining essentially the same, they were simplified where possible and also rewritten to make them more user-friendly. In addition, the hearing procedure was rewritten to provide a far greater degree of clarity and guidance to Standards Committee members.

4. Alternative Options considered and Reasons for Rejection

4.1 None. This is a report for information.

5. Implications

Issue	Comments
Financial (including mainstreaming)	No costs identified. In-house standards training has no cost. However, the Learning & Development Panel will be asked to consider the adequacy of the current member training budget, with a view to a possible growth bid being made.
Legal	No issues identified, although the matters discussed in this report are all aspects of good governance.
Assessment of Risk	No risks identified.
Equality	No equality issues identified.

6. Consultations

6.1 None.

**7. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985:
List of Background Papers**

None

8. Freedom of Information

8.1 The report does not contain exempt information under the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A and all information can be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.