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## Parish Council Members of the Standards Committee – Overview and Job Description

### Overview

#### **Standards Committee – Who is on it and what does it do?**

The Standards Committee is one of the Council's committees which have decision-making powers and report to full Council. It is composed of *at least*:

- Six Council members, appointed by full Council (currently eight members)
- Three parish members, elected by ballot, if required, of all South Cambridgeshire parish councils and meetings (currently four members), and
- Four independent members, who have their appointment ratified by full Council following a recommendation from the Standards Committee Appointments Panel. 'Independent' in this context means simply a person who is not a member or officer of the Council, any parish council within South Cambridgeshire, any other relevant authority or any political party – that is, a lay member (currently seven members).

All members serve four-year terms and are eligible for re-appointment for one further term.

The Committee has the following roles and functions:

- To promote and maintain high standards of conduct by district and parish councillors and co-opted members;
- To assist district and parish councillors and co-opted members to observe the Members' Code of Conduct;
- To advise the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- To monitor the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- To advise, train or arrange to train district and parish councillors and co-opted members on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct;
- To grant dispensations to district and parish councillors and co-opted members from requirements relating to interests set out in Members' Code of Conduct;
- To deal with any reports from a case tribunal or interim case tribunal, and any report from the monitoring officer on any matter which is referred by an ethical standards officer to the monitoring officer.
- To receive reports from time to time from the monitoring officer concerning the operation of Members' Code of Conduct and in respect of his / her statutory functions under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989;
- To maintain an overview of the Council's 'whistle blowing' policy and of complaints handling.
- To respond to / consider government consultations on issues relating to standards matters.

The Committee also considers individual complaints about Members' conduct received directly by the Monitoring Officer. This includes complaints relating to District Councillors and to Parish Councillors within South Cambridgeshire. The Committee also has responsibility to appoint panels to assess all complaints upon receipt to determine whether or not they merit further investigation, to hear appeals on its initial assessments, to consider reports of investigations into complaints, and to conduct public hearings to determine the outcome of a complaint when an investigation has found evidence of a breach of the Code of Conduct.

### ***How often does it meet?***

Meetings may be held at relatively short notice when it is necessary to conduct assessment panels, appeals panels and / or local determination hearings. The full Committee meets quarterly. Meetings are held in public at South Cambridgeshire Hall usually during the daytime. Formal meetings for the 2010/11 municipal year have been scheduled tentatively for 10 am on Wednesday 16 June 2010, Wednesday 15 September 2010, Wednesday 8 December 2010 and Wednesday 9 March 2011. In addition to these formal meetings, any extra-ordinary meetings and meetings of panels will be scheduled as required throughout the year.

### ***Any payment?***

Parish Council Members of the Standards Committee receive reimbursement of expenses at the same rate as the travelling, subsistence and childcare / dependants' carer's allowances paid to elected members of the authority. Parish Council Members also receive a co-optees' allowance, set annually by the Council after consideration and recommendation by an independent remuneration panel; for 2010-11 it will be £220.

### **Job Description**

The Parish Council Member is appointed to make sure that all parish councils and meetings are represented throughout discussions and at least one Parish Council Member is required to be present whenever matters that affect parish councils and meetings are being discussed, otherwise the Committee would be considered to be inquorate. The Committee has a standing item on each regular meeting agenda for feedback from South Cambridgeshire Parish Councils and Meetings, which can be reported by the Parish Council Members either in a written summary or orally at the meeting. The Standards Board for England notes that, "the [Parish Council Member] should have the trust of people in your area". The Committee has also established a Parish Liaison Working Group to look for practical ways to address Code of Conduct and other training issues, considering the wide range and diversity of parish councils in the district:

Each Member of the Committee will be responsible to the Council for the Committee's work.

The work will involve attendance at Committee meetings, training and other sessions in order to carry out the tasks involved. Meetings and training sessions usually are held during the day at South Cambridgeshire Hall in Cambourne, although there could be opportunities to attend parish council meetings within the district, which usually are held in the evenings.

Training is mandatory before participation in a local assessment, appeal or hearing panel, or local investigation, and will be provided by the District Council, usually during the day.

Further information about the Standards Committee, including links to minutes and agendas, is available on the South Cambridgeshire District Council website: [www.scamb.gov.uk/standards](http://www.scamb.gov.uk/standards).

**The closing date for receipt of nominations is Friday 11 June 2010.** If more than one nomination is received, the process will proceed to an election and **the deadline for receipt of completed ballots from Parish Councils will be Friday 9 July 2010.** The name of the successful candidate will be presented to Council for formal co-option onto the Standards Committee on Thursday 22 July 2010. This timing will ensure that the newly-elected parish council representative will be able to undertake all relevant training prior to the formal Committee meeting on 15 September 2010.

## Person specification

These are some of the experiences, knowledge, skills and competencies which *may be helpful* in this role:

### Experience:

- A broad range of experience, preferably in public, private, voluntary or charitable sector employment or service including self-employed, employed and voluntary positions
- Knowledge / experience of committee work and procedures for meetings
- Working knowledge / experience of local government or some other aspects of the public service and / or of large, complex organisations at a senior level
- Substantial awareness and understanding of the political process
- A demonstrable interest in local issues
- Experience of dealing with matters of the kind which may be the concern of the Standards Committee in other contexts

### Knowledge and skills:

- Good interpersonal skills, including good communication skills both written and oral and the ability to co-operate with others in a committee setting
- Assertiveness
- Inquisitiveness, open-mindedness, non-judgemental, demonstrating independence of mind, objectivity and impartiality
- A commitment to the general principles governing the conduct of Councillors generally and matters of probity and integrity in particular
- Understanding of the Standards Committee's main functions
- Understanding of the role of the Parish Council Member
- Tact and diplomacy in handling sensitive matters
- Good analytical skills and be able to demonstrate clarity of thought
- The ability to assimilate information quickly and arrive at balanced judgments

### Competencies:

- A person in whose impartiality and integrity the public, and in particular the Parish Councils and Meetings, can have confidence
- Understand and comply with confidentiality requirements
- Able to make a significant contribution to the work of the committee
- Access to internet and e-mail

### Other requirements:

- To agree formally to observe the South Cambridgeshire District Council Local Code of Conduct for Members including completing a Declaration of Interests form. This register will be available to be viewed by members of the public.
- A district councillor may not be a Parish Member
- Parish Members may not be closely connected to district councillors.