

South Cambridgeshire Hall
Cambourne Business Park
Cambourne
Cambridge
CB23 6EA

t: 03450 450 500
f: 01954 713149
dx: DX 729500 Cambridge 15
minicom: 01480 376743
www.scambs.gov.uk



Independent 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 Regulatory Committees: bodies which have decision-making powers and report to full Council. It is composed of:

- at least six Council members, appointed by full Council
- at least three parish members, elected directly by parish councils and meetings and co-opted by the full Council, and
- at least four independent members co-opted 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, or any other relevant authority – that is, a lay member.

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

The committee is currently seeking to appoint two additional independent members.

The Constitution of South Cambridgeshire District Council sets out the following roles and functions of the Standards Committee:

- (a) Promote and maintain high standards of conduct by councillors and co-opted members;
- (b) Assist the councillors and co-opted members to observe the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (c) Advise the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (d) Monitor the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (e) Advise, train or arrange to train councillors and co-opted members on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (f) Initial assessment of all complaints relating to breach of the Code of Conduct by a district or parish councillor in South Cambridgeshire;
- (g) Instruct the Monitoring Officer to carry out an investigation into whether the Code of Conduct has been breached following a complaint (in accordance with the Procedure for the Local Investigation of Referred Complaints set out at Part 5 Section P of the Constitution);
- (h) Referral of complaints to Standards for England where appropriate;
- (i) Instruct the Monitoring Officer to take other action regarding a complaint instead of carrying out an investigation;
- (j) Review on request decisions of the Assessment Panel to take no further action in relation to a complaint that a district or parish councillor has breached the Code of Conduct;
- (k) Receive the investigation report of the Monitoring Officer on any matter which is referred by the Assessment Panel to the Monitoring Officer and make a decision on whether it agrees with the report's findings;
- (l) Receive and take a decision where necessary on any other report from the Monitoring Officer on any matter which is referred by the Assessment Panel to the Monitoring Officer;

- (m) Hold hearings to determine complaints in which an investigation report has held that the Code of Conduct has been breached (in accordance with the hearings procedure set out in Part 5 Section Q of the Constitution) and, where appropriate, to impose a sanction on a councillor;
- (n) Refer determinations to the First-Tier Tribunal (Local Government Standards in England) (formerly the Adjudication Panel for England) for a greater sanction if considered necessary;
- (o) Grant dispensations to councillors and co-opted members from requirements relating to interests set out in Members' Code of Conduct;
- (p) The exercise of (a) to (o) above in relation to the parish councils in its area and the members of those parish councils;
- (q) Receiving 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;
- (r) Overview of the Council's 'whistle-blowing' policy;
- (s) Overview of complaints handling and Ombudsman investigations;
- (t) Supervise, receive applications and make directions in relation to politically restricted posts under section 3A of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Since May 2008 the Committee has considered all complaints made about the conduct of any members of the District Council and also of any members of Parish or Community Councils within South Cambridgeshire.

How often does it meet?

The Committee meets quarterly, and its sub-committees (the Assessment Panel, Review Panel and Hearings Panel) meet as required to determine complaints. Committee meetings and hearings panels are held in public at South Cambridgeshire Hall during the daytime; assessment and review panels are held in private at South Cambridgeshire Hall during the daytime.

Any payment?

Independent 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. Independent Members also receive a co-optees' allowance, set annually by the Council; for 2010-11 it is £276 for the year. The Standards Committee elects an Independent Member as its Chairman each year, for which there is a special responsibility allowance, also set annually by the Council; for 2010-11 it is £443 for the year. These allowances are scheduled to be reviewed during 2010/11 by an independent panel, which will make any recommendations to the full Council.

Job Description

The Government considers the role of Independent Members on the Committee so important that the Committee will not be able to conduct any business unless at least one independent member is present. An Independent Member must chair the Standards Committee and all its panels and sub-committees. The Independent Member is appointed to:

- help increase public confidence and provide a clear signal that the Standards Committee is fair;
- bring a wider perspective from outside experiences; and
- work with the other Members of the Standards Committee to fulfil the roles and functions of that body.

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.

As co-opted members of a District Council committee, Independent Members' names, contact details and register of interests will be available to the public through the Council's website and the Standards Committee's newsletter to district and parish councillors, with hard copies provided upon request.

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

Please note that Independent Members of the Committee must not now be, nor during the last five years have been a Member or employee of the District Council or of any Parish in South Cambridgeshire. Anyone related to, or a close friend of, any Member or employee of the Council is also excluded. A full person specification is enclosed, listing the essential and desirable qualifications for an independent member, and all criteria which would disqualify an application.

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.

The closing date for applications is Friday 18 June 2010.