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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 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
- Three parish members, elected by ballot, if required, of all South Cambridgeshire parish councils and meetings, 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.

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

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 both District Councillors and Parish Councillors within South Cambridgeshire. It is expected that, from 1 April 2008 or shortly thereafter (government guidance is awaited), the Committee will have responsibility to appoint panels to assess all complaints upon receipt to determine whether or not they merit further investigation, and to hear appeals on its initial assessments.

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 Committee meets quarterly, but this will increase dependent upon the volume of local hearings. Meetings are held in public at South Cambridgeshire Hall during the daytime. Formal meetings for the 2008/09 municipal year have been scheduled for 10 am on Wednesday 11 June 2008, Wednesday 10 September 2008, Wednesday 10 December 2008 and Wednesday 11 March 2009. In addition to these formal meetings, any extra-ordinary meetings and meetings of sub-committees (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 / dependents' carer's allowances paid to elected members of the authority. Parish Council Members also receive a co-optees' allowance, set annually by the Council; for 2007-08 it was £215.

Job Description

The Parish Council Member is appointed to make sure that all parish and town councils are represented throughout discussions and at least one Parish Council Member is required to be present whenever matters that affect parish or town councils 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".

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.

The closing date for receipt of nominations is Friday 6 June 2008. 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 4 July 2008.** This will ensure that the newly-elected parish council representative hopefully will be able to undertake all relevant training prior to the formal Committee meeting on 10 September 2008.

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 requirement:

- 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 on request.