

Committee: Audit and Standards
Title: Internal Audit: Standards Complaints

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Summary

1. This report presents a recent internal audit review of the process for dealing with standards complaints.
2. It was commissioned by the Chief Executive following concerns about the process or timescale in dealing with certain Code of Conduct complaints.

Recommendations

3. None

Financial Implications

4. None

Background Papers

5. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

None

Impact

- 6.

Communication/Consultation	None
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Health and Safety	None
Human Rights/Legal Implications	The Code of Conduct processes and recommendations have been considered

	by solicitors during this audit
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

7. Following the conclusion of a long-running Code of Conduct complaint against the former Leader of the Council, several short-term actions were undertaken to improve the way the Council handles such matters and improve the protection afforded to councillors as they undertake their duties.
8. These included a full review by an experienced solicitor of Registers of Interest, and the provision of the proper form of words to declare an interest at meetings. A new process was put in place for the selection of Panel members, for Standards and other hearings.
9. In addition to these immediate actions, the Chief Executive commissioned an internal audit review into standards processes in order to identify any systemic weaknesses and provide an independent opinion of where improvement could be made.
10. A second Code of Conduct complaint against a parish councillor was an additional catalyst for this review as, although relatively complex, it took a year to resolve the matter.
11. Both these cases were among those used as examples during the audit, which was conducted by the then-Internal Audit Manager (who has since left the Council).
12. The final report is attached at Appendix A. It has been shared with the Independent Persons in advance of publication. The recommendations have been accepted and actioned by the Monitoring Officer, and previous and current Deputy Monitoring Officers.
13. The development of the triage process when a complaint is first received is the key improvement that has been put in place, which is helping resolve complaints more quickly.
14. The incoming permanent Monitoring Officer may want to take a further view of the Council's Code of Conduct processes in due course.

Risk Analysis

15.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Code of Conduct complaints are not dealt with in a timely and proportionate manner	2 – some complaints can be complex and do reply on engagement by all parties	2 – such complaints can be stressful for complainants, the subject member(s) and even officers involved	Improved processes as recommended in the audit report will help bring complaints to a conclusion more quickly

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.