

<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>The Monitoring Officer</b>
<b>TO:</b>	<b>Standards Committee</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>27 January 2021</b>

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**Subject:**

**Local Government Ethical Standards – Review of Complaints Form and Website**

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## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To provide the Committee with an update on work to update the website access to the complaints process and present a revised Complaints Form for approval.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee is asked to:

- 1) Note the improvements to be made to the Website in accordance with the discussions at the October meeting
- 2) Note the revised Complaints Form incorporating the changes as agreed at the October meeting.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

As part of the Committee's work programme for 2020/21 the Committee at its meeting in October undertook a review of the Member Complaints Form utilised by complainants to record their concerns for consideration by the Monitoring Officer. The form had been in place for a number of years and the current Code of Conduct requires that the Complainant use this form to record their complaint in writing. The Committee pending the wider revision of the Code of Conduct outlined was invited to consider, what if any, changes it suggests be made to the form.

## **4. RATIONALE**

The Committee in October made a number of observations about the Form. In addition the Committee considered current access to the Form via the website and suggested some changes and improvements.

It was agreed for examples that the form would be better being reproduced in a web-form format, to make the process more straightforward and that a flowchart be created to show potential complainants how the complaint would be processed. Additionally, it

was felt that complainants be given the option to suggest how the matter could be resolved to their satisfaction.

The full range of improvements proposed by the Committee was agreed as follows and attached as Appendices are references to the improvements made:

- To schedule the converting of the Form into an E-Form that can be completed on-line or downloaded for completion and e-mailing later
- Improve the general launch page on the website to include a simple process flow-chart (Chart **Appendix A**)
- Ensure that there is as few as possible `clicks` from the main site to the E-Form on the Launch page so it is as direct access as possible
- To add to the Form a section on desired outcome from the complaint. (Updated Complaints Form **Appendix B**)
- Explain on Website the potential outcomes to complaints and ask Complainant in completing Form to indicate what outcome is desired (Updated Complaints Form **Appendix B** & explanation **Appendix C**)
- Provide on website simple reference to key timescales (quoted in the Arrangements for Member Conduct Complaints (Reference on site – **Appendix D**)
- Reference on website that if complaint made directly to Monitoring Officer as long as information on key information as required on the Form has been addressed, Monitoring Officer has discretion to accept complaint (Statement **Appendix E**)

The one matter outstanding is the scheduling of the conversion of the Complaints Form to an e-form. In the current climate with other urgent priorities for e-form design and implementation it has not been possible to programme this work but it is on the Schedule for when resources permit.

In the meantime, an updated Form which can be downloaded in `Word` is available. (**Appendix B**),

## **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The current Council Code of Conduct and complaint processes was adopted in line with the Council's obligations under section 27 (2) of the Localism Act 2011 and complies with the requirements under section 28 of the Act. The improvements to the Form and process are consistent with the requirements of the Act.

## **6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

A governance framework in local authorities is necessary to promote and maintain high ethical standards, and to ensure public confidence.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

None contained in this report.

## **8. CONSULTATIONS**

The Standards Committee regularly discusses the Council's arrangements for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct in open session and recommendations separate on this Agenda consider an option for widening public engagement.

### **Chief Officer/Member**

Contact Officer: David Fairclough

Date: December 2020

Background Papers: Report by Committee on Standards in Public Life – Local Government Ethical Standards