

AUDIT & STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Whistle-blowing Policy has been reviewed. The following key points arise.

- The policy continues to meet all legal requirements.
- The drafting of the policy (as opposed to its substantive content) has recently been reviewed to improve its presentation and clarity; the updated version will be published and publicised across the Council shortly.
- The Human Resources Team is reviewing the staff induction process and it is proposed to include an introduction to the policy (as part of the general information provided to staff to ensure they are aware of how to raise any concerns / resolve issues formally or informally, in confidence).

The Code of Conduct and the Standards Panel have been reviewed.

- The changes approved last year, achieved the desired objective (i.e. not unduly limiting member participation whilst protecting the key principles underlying the Code).
- 8 complaints were made during the course of the year (involving parish and district councillors). 2 were referred to the Panel and sanctions issued; 2 which amounted to breaches of the Code were dealt with informally at the request / agreement of the complainants; 2 were not referred for investigation (as they did not amount to a breach) and the remaining 2 are currently pending a review by a member of the Standards Panel.
- There hasn't been any adverse feedback on the Code although one complainant has raised a concern with the Code not addressing adverse public perceptions even though there might not be a breach of the Code.
- There are currently sufficient, well qualified and experienced members of the Standards Panel to choose from.
- Having discussed neighbouring authorities' Standards Panel arrangements with their Monitoring Officers, other authorities appear to have less formal arrangements than ours. Although, our Panel is working well and there is some benefit in continuing to have a formal panel (in terms of discouraging breaches of the Code in the first place), the usefulness of our panel appears to turn largely on the lack of awareness, that unlike the statutory position prior to 2012, standards panels do not in law have any significant sanctions (particularly regarding parish and town councils).
- Parish / town councils in the area have received written guidance from me during the last year on the use of dispensations although I am only aware of a dispensation being used on one occasion. Instead, such councils have expressed interest in reviewing their codes. I have been approached by Gloucestershire Association Town and Parish Councils to provide training to help town / parish councils undertake reviews. Consequently, a seminar has been arranged for Thursday 2 July, in the Council Chamber 4.30 to 6.30pm. GATPC will be advertising the event. If members of the Committee wish to be involved in the event please let me know.

Karen Trickey
Legal Services Manager and Monitoring Officer