

9 July 2015

9. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

(d) SUMMARY OF DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE

DPI Conviction in Dorset

1. The Committee has noted the case of the former leader of Dorset County Council who is thought to have become the first councillor to be convicted of a criminal offence under the Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) provisions introduced by the Localism Act 2011. The case related to his conduct as a District Councillor when he participated and voted in a meeting about the East Dorset Core Strategy - despite having a DPI in the matter through being paid by a housing charity. As he had a DPI, he could not take part in that meeting. He was given a six-month conditional discharge and ordered to pay £930 costs. The court did not disqualify him from being an elected member, but it had the power to do so.

2. The Committee has asked the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to send details of the case electronically to all members of the Council to highlight the need for members to give prior thought to potential conflict of interests, take advice where necessary, and avoid even inadvertent breaches of the DPI provisions. Such convictions of course create a criminal record, and the court can impose a disqualification from being a member.

Recent Member Complaints

3. Since the last report to the Committee in July 2014, the Council has received 5 Formal complaints that a County Councillor breached the Members' Code of Conduct. No complaints have been received connected with the recent elections. The Committee received a summary of the details of the formal complaints and has noted the outcome in each case. There have been no findings of breach of the Code.

Independent Member Appointment

4. The constitution sets out that the Committee should have 3 non-voting independent members upon it in addition to the elected members. The Committee currently has 2 such members and so there is a need to appoint a 3rd (who cannot be an elected member or an officer of the Council).

5. The Committee has asked the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to follow a simplified process for seeking an independent member for co-option by the

Committee. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services has been authorised to contact district council colleagues, create a press release and make Group Leaders aware of the vacant position. The Committee has also approved the job description for the independent member and agreed that applicants must not be a paid-up member of a political party.

6. The Committee has authorised the Head of Legal and Democratic Services in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to finalise the detailed arrangements for the appointment of the independent member by the Committee.

Mrs A T Hingley
Chairman

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Head of Legal and Democratic Services) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda papers for the meeting of the Standards and Ethics Committee held on 1 July 2015