

Resolving complaints before they escalate

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Areas to be covered

1. Importance of ethical standards in public life
2. Role of the monitoring officer in addressing complaints
3. The limitations of the Monitoring Officer role
4. How District Councillors and Town/Parish Councils can help

Importance of Ethical Standards

- **Seven Principles of Public life** provides the basis of an ethical standards framework for local authorities and other public bodies.
- District/Town/Parish Codes of Conduct embody those seven principles
- Ethical standards are crucial for several reasons:
 - **Trust and Confidence:** High ethical standards help build trust and confidence among the public.
 - **Accountability and Transparency:** Ethical standards ensure that we are accountable for our actions and decisions.
 - **Quality of Service:** Ethical behaviour leads to better decision-making and higher quality services.
 - **Public Trust:** Upholding ethical standards is essential for maintaining public trust.
 - **Legal and Moral Obligations:** We have a legal and moral obligation to act in the public's best interest.
- “**How**” a service is delivered is as important as “**what**” is delivered.

Role of the monitoring officer in addressing complaints

- Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct generally
- Training members on ethical standards and the code of conduct
- Principal advisor to the Standards Committee
- Receiving and processing Code of Conduct complaints:-
 - Advising on the complaints process
 - Acknowledging complaints
 - Conducting an initial assessment
 - Consulting with the member

Role of the monitoring officer in addressing complaints

- Receiving and processing Code of Conduct complaints:-
 - Deciding (in conjunction with an Independent Person) whether the complaint merits
 - No further action
 - Other action
 - Refer for formal investigation
- Investigations – appointing an independent investigator
- Reviewing the findings of the independent investigator
- If necessary, arranging a hearing before the Standards Committee

Limitations of the Monitoring Officer role

The Monitoring Officer cannot intervene where a complaint is:

- About a member of staff
- The day to day running of a Council
- The decisions that are taken
- Relating to a member's behaviour in their personal life
- Behaviour is not covered by the Code of Conduct
- About something that happened too long ago

How District Councillors and Town/Parish Councils can help

- **Acting before a situation escalates** and preventing incidents which may bring the council or individuals into disrepute.
- **Open dialogue** – maintaining regular communication with your Monitoring Officer to ensure they are aware of potential issues or complaints early on
- **Understanding the role** of the Monitoring Officer and when complaints should be submitted to the Monitoring Officer or when they should be dealt with through the standard organisational complaints process
- **Having a robust internal complaints process** in place that is accessible to the public, to prevent escalation
- Strictly **following that** complaints **process**
- **Listening** to the complainant and taking their concerns seriously
- If considering **submitting a complaint** – consider the risk of further damage to relationships
- If considering **submitting a complaint** – consider the sanctions (or lack thereof) available to the Standards Committee

How District Councillors and Town/Parish Councils can help

- Considering **informal or formal mediation** at an early stage
- Being **open and transparent** – both to complainants and in any investigation
- Participating in **training sessions** on ethical standards and Code of Conduct
- **Promoting awareness** among council members and staff about ethical behaviour
- **Act on the recommendations** of the Monitoring Officer/Standards Committee
- **Regularly review** and update **policies and procedures** to align with legal and ethical standards
- **Engaging with the public** to understand their concerns and address issues before they become complaints

Questions?