

ARRANGEMENTS FOR DEALING WITH CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS UNDER THE LOCALISM ACT 2011

1. Context

- 1.1 These Arrangements are made under section 28 of the Localism Act 2011. They set out the process that Maidstone Borough Council has adopted for dealing with complaints that an elected or co-opted member or parish councillor has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct.

2. Interpretation

- 2.1 District Council' means Maidstone Borough Council.
- 2.2 'Code of Conduct' means the Code of Conduct, which the District and Parish Council have adopted under section 27(2) of the Localism Act 2011.
- 2.3 'Complainant' means a person who has submitted a complaint in accordance with these Arrangements alleging that a Subject Member has breached the Code of Conduct.
- 2.4 'Disclosable Pecuniary Interest' means those disclosable pecuniary interests that meet the definition prescribed by regulations (as amended from time to time) as set out in Annex 2 to the Code of Conduct.
- 2.5 'Hearing Panel' means the panel appointed by the District Council to determine the outcome of any complaint alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct by a Subject Member in accordance with these Arrangements.
- 2.6 'Independent Person' means a person or persons appointed by the District Council under section 28(7) of the Localism Act 2011:
- (a) whose views must be sought and taken into account by the District Council before a decision is made on any complaint alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct by a Subject Member;
 - (b) who may be consulted by the Subject Member about the complaint.
- 2.7 'Investigating Officer' means the person appointed by the Monitoring Officer to undertake a formal investigation of a complaint alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct by a Subject Member. The Investigating Officer may be another senior officer of the District Council, an officer of another authority or an external investigator.
- 2.8 'Monitoring Officer' is a senior officer of the District Council who has statutory responsibility for maintaining the Register of Members' Interests and who is responsible for administering the arrangements for dealing with any complaint alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct by a Subject Member. It includes any other officer of the District Council nominated by the Monitoring Officer to act on their behalf.

- 2.9 'Parish Council' means the relevant parish council within the Borough of Maidstone.
- 2.10 'Parties' means the Complainant, Subject Member and the Investigating Officer, as appropriate.
- 2.11 'Subject Member' means an elected member or co-opted member of the District or Parish Council against whom a complaint has been made alleging a breach the Code of Conduct.

3. Appointment of Independent Person

- 3.1 The Council shall appoint the Independent Person (and any substitute) in accordance with the requirements of section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 upon such terms as to remuneration and expenses as may be determined by the District Council from time to time.
- 3.2 The Independent Person (and any substitute) shall be treated as if they were a member of the District Council for the purposes of the District Council's arrangements for indemnifying and insuring its Members.

4. Making a complaint

- 4.1 A complaint alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct by a Subject Member must be made in writing and addressed to the Monitoring Officer using the Complaint Form at Annex 1 to these Arrangements. Complainants who find difficulty in making their complaint in writing (e.g. because of a disability), will be offered assistance.
- 4.2 The Subject Member will normally be informed of the identity of the Complainant and details of the complaint made against them, but the Complainant's identity and/or details of their complaint may be withheld at the Complainant's request if it appears to the Monitoring Officer that there are sound reasons for granting such a request (refer to paragraph 5 of Annex 1 to these Arrangements).
- 4.3 The Monitoring Officer will normally acknowledge receipt of a complaint within 5 working days of receiving it. At the same time (and subject to para. 4.2 above), the Monitoring Officer will send a copy of the complaint to the Subject Member in accordance with paragraph 2 of Annex 1 to these Arrangements.

5. Criminal conduct

- 5.1 In accordance with section 34 of the Localism Act 2011, it is a criminal offence if, without reasonable excuse, you:
- (a) fail to notify the Monitoring Officer of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest before the end of 28 days beginning with the day you become, or are re-elected or re-appointed, a Member or Co-opted Member of the Authority;
 - (b) fail to notify the Monitoring Officer of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest before the end of 28 days beginning with the day you become aware of it, where you are acting alone in the course of discharging a function of the Authority (including making a decision in relation to the matter) and the interest is not already registered or is not the subject of a pending notification to the Monitoring Officer;

- (c) fail to disclose a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest at a meeting, where such interest has not already been registered or notified to the Monitoring Officer;
- (d) fail to notify the Monitoring Officer of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest before the end of 28 days beginning with the day you disclose it at a meeting, where such interest has not already been registered or notified to the Monitoring Officer;
- (e) take part in discussions or votes at meetings that relate to the Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, unless a dispensation has been granted;
- (f) knowingly or recklessly provide false or misleading information in any of the above disclosures or notifications.

5.2 Where a complaint against a Subject Member relates to conduct of a criminal nature referred to above, the Monitoring Officer will deal with the complaint in accordance with paragraph 4(4) of Annex 1 to these Arrangements.

6. Anonymous complaints

6.1 Complainants must provide their full name and address. An anonymous complaint will only be accepted by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person, providing it is accompanied by corroborating evidence that indicates to the Monitoring Officer that it is in the public interest to accept the complaint.

7. Role of Independent Person

6.1 The Independent Person must be consulted and have their views taken into account before the Authority makes a finding as to whether a Member has failed to comply with the Code or decides on action to be taken in respect of that Member. At any other stage of the complaints process under these Arrangements, the Independent Person may be consulted by the Monitoring Officer and/or the Subject Member.

8. Preliminary tests

8.1 The Monitoring Officer will, in consultation with the Independent Person, put the complaint through a number of preliminary tests, in accordance with paragraph 1 of Annex 1 to these Arrangements.

8.2 In the event that the Independent Person is unavailable or unable to act, the time limits specified in paragraph 1 of Annex 1 may either be extended by the Monitoring Officer or the Monitoring Officer may act alone in taking the decision or action.

9. Informal resolution

9.1 The Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person, may consider that the complaint can be resolved informally at any stage in accordance with paragraph 6 of Annex 1 to these Arrangements.

10. Investigation

10.1 If the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person, decides that the complaint merits formal investigation, they will, within 10 working days of receiving it, appoint an Investigating Officer to undertake the investigation, and inform the Parties of the appointment.

10.2 The Investigating Officer will investigate the complaint in accordance with Annex 2 to these Arrangements.

11. Hearing

11.1 If the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person, considers that informal resolution is not appropriate or is unlikely to be achieved, then they will convene a meeting of the Hearing Panel to determine the outcome of the complaint in accordance with Annex 3 to these Arrangements.

12. Sanctions

12.1 Where a Subject Member has been found by the Hearing Panel to have breached the Code of Conduct, the Hearing Panel may apply any one or more sanctions in accordance with paragraph 4 of Annex 3 to these Arrangements.

13. Appeal

13.1 There is no right of appeal for the Complainant or the Subject Member against decisions of either the Monitoring Officer or the Hearing Panel.

14. Revision of these Arrangements

14.1 The District Council may by resolution agree to amend these Arrangements and has delegated to the Monitoring Officer and the Hearing Panel the right to depart from these Arrangements, where considered expedient to do so in order to secure the effective and fair consideration of any matter.