

**Advice from the Standards Panel held on 13 November 2018 to
Audit and Governance Committee**

The standards panel had sampled 37 out of the 64 complaints received during the period 30 April 2017 to 30 September 2018; it was noted that those 64 complaints related to 30 individual elected members.

The panel had noted that generally there was a good standard of governance and behaviour in Herefordshire, especially as there were approx. 1,300 parish councillors.

The panel felt that the following were welcomed:

- The introduction of a public interest test when considering a rejection of a complaint following the resignation of a councillor
- The introduction of decision notices. It was felt that longer responses would be appropriate but it was noted that occasionally legal clarity was required.
- Herefordshire Council working with the political group leadership as part of the Local Protocol on Relations between Political Groups.
- Listening to the Herefordshire Council official audio recording of committee meetings. This assisted with establishing the accuracy and context of the comments made. It was noted that the council meetings were available on the website and the audio recordings would be accessible for up to six years.

The panel felt that where there were a cluster of complaints against a town or parish council, there may need to be a recommendation of mediation. However, it was noted that this is only advisory to parish or town council.

The panel noted that an early apology of the behaviour would diffuse the situation.

The panel welcomed that there was monitoring of compliance with the recommendations made under the monitoring officer resolution. It was noted that if there was no compliance, then this may lead to a further code of conduct complaint. It was further noted that in respect of town or parish councils, the compliance would be that they had considered the recommendations made under the arrangements for dealing with code of conduct complaints.

The panel had noted that the two referrals to the Social Care and Local Government Ombudsman had been dismissed without investigation. This indicated that the Herefordshire procedure was effective.

The panel were satisfied that the approach for seeking the independent person's views was appropriate.

RESOLVED

That:

- a) **the arrangements for dealing with code of conduct complaints are appropriate and consistency applied; and**
- b) **The following be recommended to Audit and Governance Committee:**
 1. **the training and development for members include guidance on social media; appropriate usage of emails, chairing of meetings in relation to the**

- conduct of councillors at those meetings, the responsibilities of ward members representing their views at planning and regulatory committee**
- 2. the monitoring officer be supported in making a recommendation of mediation when there is evidence of a breakdown of relationships**