

WDC Standards Committee – Local Filtering of Complaints.

Speaker Mr. Fred Noble.

Mr Noble had been involved with the Standards Committee since 2004 as an independent member. This means independent of any political party or any statutory body. There are now 3 independent members of WDC Standards Committee, 2 Parish Councillors and 3 District Councillors.

The new regime introduced in May this year means that local Standards Committees need to have separate groups to look at complaints in the first instance. These groups have to be chaired by an independent member, and they will decide if the complaint should be investigated. This has required Wychavon Standards Committee members to have training, using previous complaints as examples to practice on.

Mr Noble, when originally appointed to the Standards Committee, began a self education programme, attending parish council meetings and Standards Board training. He said how he had learned a lot about how councils work and what they do. He referred to the Terms of Reference of Wychavon Standards Committee which in particular states that it is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct among District, Town, and Parish councillors. A main task of the Standards Committee is to promote and provide training .

He had training in relations with the media, as they often report on Standards Committee case hearings.

He said he was very willing to give advice and guidance to councillors and Councils, and happy to attend Parish Council meetings.

The Standards Committee meet quarterly, unless there is a case to consider which requires further meetings. He expects that the work load will increase substantially, judging by the Standards Board statistics.

Questions were asked on a number of aspects,:

Q. LSPs include non-elected members who are not subject to the Code of Conduct.

FN pointed out that a Code of Conduct applied to Police, Ambulance Service, Fire Service and other statutory bodies, but accepted that not all LSP members were under the Code.

Q. If a Standards Cttee member personally knows a Councillor subject to complaint, what happens?

FN. They would have to declare their interest and stand down.

Q. Who makes complaints and to whom?

FN .Complaints are to be made to Wychavon DC, and if it is against a councillor, to the WDC Monitoring Officer, Ian Marshall,

Q. Would not complaints be better considered outside of the local area.?

FN An appeals procedure provided for independent investigation of the initial assessment.

FN summed up by saying that the standards process is being taken seriously by councillors in Wychavon which will reduce the occasions for complaint. Also that all of Wychavon councillors had submitted their Register of Interests.

The chairman thanked Fred Noble for his talk, and reminded the meeting that the possibility of breaking the Code can easily arise and we should all be alert to that.

