

Independent Person

2017 Annual Report to the Council

I was appointed as Independent Person (IP) in July 2013 for a three year term, in accordance with the Localism Act 2011; my term was subsequently extended by two years. I made my last report to the Council in September 2016.

Since then, we sadly lost the then Monitoring Officer (MO), Melanie Clay, in November 2016. I am delighted however that the Council appointed Asmat Hussain to that role a few months ago; I am very pleased to see how she is introducing a more systematic approach to complaints in relation to the Code of Conduct. It is also very pleasing that the new Code of Conduct complaints regime itself seems to have settled down and to be working well. In particular, incidents of poor behaviour are now being handled by local resolution and with input from Group Leaders and party whips, as they properly should be.

Since my last report there were no substantive complaints until the second half of 2017, when a number of cases have been coming forward on which I have been consulted. Some of these present serious allegations, on which, with my support, the MO has taken further action. (Complaints are reported quarterly to the Standards (Advisory) Committee by the MO).

Earlier in the year there were two historical cases with Code of Conduct elements which stemmed from the Clear Up Project; the substantive issues in both cases had been pursued and resolved and, given the lapse of time, the MO and I did not feel that it would be in the public interest to expend resources on further investigation. This was endorsed by the Investigation & Disciplinary Sub-Committee of the Standards (Advisory) Committee.

I very much welcome the way in which the Code of Conduct regime has been further strengthened, such as the seminars for Members. I hope that the importance of visibly high ethical standards is now firmly embedded, and that the Standards Advisory Committee will have greater prominence in its monitoring role.

My term of appointment will come to an end next July, when I shall submit a final report.

Elizabeth Hall

December 2017

