

Independent Person

2016 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. I made my last report to the Council in July 2015.

At that time I expressed the hope that Mayor Biggs' commitment to openness and accountability would characterise the Council in future, and that the Code of Conduct would be accorded the status it deserves as the Standard which all members of the Council observe. I understand that a great deal of work has been done in the past twelve months towards more effective governance, and Mayor Biggs has assured me that the Standards regime will be a key element of that. So, although I am disappointed that it has not yet been possible to submit to the Council the proposed new, streamlined, Code and associated complaint procedures (agreed by the Standards Advisory Committee in autumn 2015), I am pleased to note that these will be put forward for adoption very shortly. Indeed, I am delighted to know that the Governance Review Working Group has made such good progress overall.

I hope that the revisions to Council governance will give greater prominence to the role of the Standards Advisory Committee (or whatever succeeds it), so that it plays a full and proper part in maintenance of high standards, rather than being merely a recipient of complaints.

This year has seen a marked decrease in the number of complaints on which I have been asked to give my opinion; there have been four, only one of which was sent forward for investigation. The Monitoring or Deputy Monitoring Officer and I were of the same mind in each case. Without wanting to speculate about the reasons for the decrease, I am delighted at the indications that poor standards of behaviour are now being dealt with within the meetings of the Council, or by the Group leaders.

My current appointment has now completed its three-year term. I would like to thank the Council for its support for my previous reports, and the members of the SAC for the constructive debate we have had about seeking improvements to the old Code and its procedures.

Elizabeth Hall

July 2016