STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE
11th September, 2025

Present:- Councillor Clarke (in the Chair); Councillors Beck, Harper, Keenan, Lelliott and also Mrs. A. Bingham (Independent Member).

Also in attendance was Mr. P. Beavers (Independent Person).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T. Collingham, Hall, Monk, Mrs. K. Penney (Independent Member) and Mr. D. Roper-Newman (Independent Person).

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

12. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:- That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for (Minute Nos. 17 and 18 (Whistleblowing and Complaints) on the grounds that the appendices to those reports involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

13. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 12TH JUNE, 2025

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12th June, 2025 were approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

14. APPOINTMENT OF PARISH COUNCIL MEMBERS TO THE STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer which recommended the appointment of Parish Council Members to the Standards and Ethics Committee following a ballot by the YLCA (Yorkshire Local Council Association).

These positions contributed to the Standard and Ethics Committee which comprised eight Borough Councillors, three Parish Councillors and five Independent Members.

As a result of the three Parish Council Members, Alan Buckley, Richard Swann and Monica Carroll, respectively standing down, resigning and the expiry of their term of office, a ballot for new Parish Council members was undertaken in order to determine candidates to fill these roles. As such a ballot for new Parish Council Members had been undertaken by the YLCA (Yorkshire Local Council Association) and the successful nominees were

Councillor Lisa Gibbins, Councillor Tony Griffin and Councillor Mark Senior.

Resolved:- (1) That Council confirm the appointment of Councillor Lisa Gibbins, Councillor Tony Griffin and Councillor Mark Senior as co-opted Parish Council Members of the Standards and Ethics Committee until the Annual General Meeting of the Council in 2029.

(2) That formal thanks be recorded to the outgoing Parish Council Members, Alan Buckley, Monica Carroll and Richard Swann for their service and contribution to the Standards and Ethics Committee.

15. REVIEW OF MEMBERS' REGISTER OF INTERESTS

The Deputy Monitoring Officer outlined the need for Members to regularly review and update their Register of Interests.

A recent review of Members' Registers of Interests confirmed the vast majority had been completed over the past year (if updates were required), and appeared to be compliant, with no concerns to report.

It was noted that some Town and Parish Councils did not have a full set of Register of Interests published on their websites and that a reminder had been issued to Parish and Town Council Clerks reiterating the importance for councillors to complete and have their Register of Interests published on the relevant website.

Members would be reminded regularly via the Members' Bulletin on the need to periodically check their own personal register and update it accordingly.

A more formal audit of Parish and Town Council Register of Interests would be undertaken, with findings to be reported back to the Committee in the New Year.

Resolved:- (1) That a reminder be included in the Members' Bulletin by the Monitoring Officer to act as a prompt for Members to regularly review their Register of Interests and update accordingly.

(2) That the findings from the detailed audit on Parish and Town Council Register of Interests be reported back to the Standards and Ethics Committee in the New Year.

16. LGA'S DEBATE NOT HATE CAMPAIGN

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer which set out the objectives of and the resources available to the Council and Members through the Local Government Association's (LGA) Debate Not Hate Campaign.

The LGA recently published its latest Debate Not Hate survey, which revealed that 70% of Councillors had experienced abuse or intimidation, and over 50% had been targeted by misinformation campaigns. The findings also showed a rise in online abuse. The impact of such abuse included mental health strain, reduced civic engagement, and withdrawal from public life.

The Debate Not Hate Campaign, has been built around a set of strategic objectives designed to protect local democracy, support Councillors and foster a culture of respectful political discourse. The Campaign's objectives included:-

- Raising Public Awareness of the Role of Councillors.
- Encouraging Healthy and Respectful Debate.
- Improving Support for Councillors Facing Abuse.
- Lobbying for Legislative and Policy Change.
- Empowering Councils and Councillors to take action.
- Building a Culture of Safety and Inclusion in Local Politics.

As part of the LGA's 'Debate Not Hate' campaign, Councillors and Councils would be invited to sign the associated Public Statement. The Committee was also asked to consider whether it would be appropriate for the Council to formally support the statement, as outlined in the report, by means of a Motion at Full Council.

The Committee confirmed that they were supportive of the approach to invite Councillors to sign the Public Statement, with communication to be issued via the Members' Bulletin. They also expressed support for recommending the adoption of a Motion in the same terms to Council.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the campaign's Self-Assessment Toolkit, which was designed to help councils evaluate existing practices and identify areas for improvement. Views were sought on a proposal to establish a Working Group to systematically work through the self-assessment, explore opportunities to enhance council procedures, and recommend any necessary changes.

The Committee's views were also sought on where additional guidance or support might be needed, which the Working Group could prioritise in the initial phase of its work.

The Committee expressed concern about the upward trajectory of online abuse and the difficulties in identifying its source or perpetrators. Additional concerns were raised about the growing use of AI and its potential to negatively impact democratic processes.

Whilst it was acknowledged that the Committee did not hold significant sanctioning powers, it was recognised that it could nonetheless play a valuable role in identifying and recommending appropriate measures to support improvement in areas requiring attention.

Discussion ensued regarding the arrangements for the Working Group, including membership, and the anticipated frequency of meetings. It was suggested that an email be issued via the Clerk to Committee Members inviting expressions of interest.

Furthermore the Committee wished to write to the three local MPs on this matter and suggested this be progressed through the Working Group.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That the Committee noted the proposal for a motion to Full Council, in the terms of the LGA Public Statement as set out at Paragraph 2.3 of the report.

(3) That individual Councillors be encouraged to sign up to the public statement referred to at Paragraph 2.3 of the report.

(4) That a Working Group be established to undertake the LGA self-assessment and report back to the Committee with its findings and recommendations.

17. A REVIEW OF CONCERNS RAISED PURSUANT TO THE WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Consideration was given to the report and appendix presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer, which provided an overview of the Whistleblowing cases which have been received over the past year.

Particular reference was made to the appendix to the report which set out clearly the description of the concerns received, and action taken. Members were advised that there were no identifiable trends or recurring issues to highlight.

Resolved:- That the Whistleblowing concerns raised over the previous year and the actions taken to address these matters be noted.

18. REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer, detailing the progress with the handling of complaints relating to breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct for Members and Town and Parish Councillors. The report listed the current cases of complaint and the action being taken in respect of each one.

Reference was made to each related case and recommended outcomes/actions identified were highlighted.

Resolved:- That the report be received and the contents noted.

19. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring the Committee's consideration.