GMCA Standards Committee

Date: 16 March 2017

Subject: Report on the Annual Report and Forward Plan of The Committee on Standards in Public Life

Report of: Liz Treacy Monitoring Officer to the GMCA.

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To provide the Committee with the Annual Report and Forward Plan of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Members note the Annual Report and Forward Plan of The Committee on Standards in Public Life.

2. That Members consider whether the GMCA should take any action arising from the content of the Annual Report and Forward Plan.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS (available for public inspection):
None

RISKS/IMPLICATIONS
Financial: None
Staffing: None
Policy: None
Equal Opportunities – Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted None

TRACKING/PROCESS
Does this report relate to a Key Decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution or in the process agreed by the AGMA Executive Board No

EXEMPTION FROM CALL IN
Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the AGMA Scrutiny Pool on the grounds of urgency? No

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Committee on Standards in Public Life (‘the Committee) is an independent advisory non-departmental public body (NDPB). The Committee monitors, reports and makes recommendations on all issues relating to standards in public life. This includes not only the standards of conduct of holders of public office, but all those involved in the delivery of public services. The Committee’s full terms of reference are set out on page 29 of the Annual Report which can be accessed via the following link:-


1.2 The Committee’s stated purpose is to help promote and maintain ethical standards in public life and thereby to protect the public interest through:

- monitoring standards issues and risks across the United Kingdom;
- conducting inquiries and reviews and making practical and proportional recommendations that are generally implemented;
- researching public perception on standards issues relating to specific areas of concern, and also over time.

1.3 To further the Committee’s remit to monitor ethical standards across public services as a whole the Committee states it will:

- maintain a watching brief to identify emerging or persistent standards issues and respond promptly to them.
- undertake independent quantitative and qualitative research into public perceptions of ethical standards.
- respond to consultations and key policy announcements and legislation where these impact on ethical standards and the Committee has an informed contribution to make.

1.4 On 4 August 2016, the Committee published its Annual Report for 2015-16, together with a forward plan for 2016-17. Pages 16 and 17 of the Report sets out the Committee’s summary of the Police and Crime Commissioners Elections whilst pages 21 and 22 contain a summary of Local Government Standards. The Committee, in response to its commitment to maintain a watching brief on the need for a mandatory code of conduct, strong local leadership, effective independent persons and concern at the lack of sanctions under the Localism Act 2011, has reported that there is evidence to suggest that the role of the independent person is generally well received and that vexatious complaints are falling. However the effectiveness of the sanctions regime was still a concern. The committee said that it continued to invite councils to consider whether their own local standards regimes are sufficient to address standards breaches and build public trust. The committee
will also continue to liaise with relevant stakeholders as to how ethical standards can be effectively embedded in all parts of local government.

1.5 Looking forward, the committee has stated that it will:

- undertake a review to clarify topics of substantial concern, research the underlying causes and identify best practice in well governed authorities in light of correspondence it has received on the issue of ethical standards in local government at both officer and member level. This work will straddle the committee's work programme for 2016-17 and 2017-18.

- review whether awareness of the need for ethical standards in the delivery of public services has changed since the publication of its report on Ethical Standards for Providers of Public Services in 2014 which considered what standards of ethical conduct should be expected from those third party organisations providing public services. The committee will discuss this with government departments to review the position and intends to report on this by Spring 2017.

Recommendations:-

1. That Members note the Annual Report and Forward Plan of The Committee on Standards in Public Life.

2. That Members consider whether the GMCA should take any action arising from the content of the Annual Report and Forward Plan.