

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the Standards Committee held at the County Hall, Durham on **28 May 2010** at **10.00 a.m.**

PRESENT

Members of the Standards Committee:

Chairman: Councillor P Charlton

Members: Councillors J Armstrong, A Bainbridge, D Southwell, W Stelling and M Williams

Mr B Argyle, Mrs D Balmer and Mrs T Naples

Councillors F Duggan, D Liversidge, J Marr and T Batson

Other Members:

P Thompson and W Ault

Councillors J Chaplow and B Myers

Apologies:

Mr D Balls, Councillor E Bell, Councillor C Carr, Councillor J Day, Councillor D Farry, Councillor M Goyns, Councillor G Holland, Mrs M Khan Willis, Councillor J Shiell and Mrs D Winter.

Prior to commencing with the business of the meeting, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services took the opportunity to update members on future of the Standards Board for England. During the Queens Speech made earlier that week, the intention of the new coalition government to abolish the Standards Board regime had been announced. She advised that at present, there was no notification on the Standards for England website and there had been very little coverage of the issue in the press. As such, members of the Committee would be kept updated as any news on the matter emerged.

A1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

In relation to the resolution of minute number A3, the Head of Safeguarding and Specialist Services was in attendance at the meeting. She took the opportunity to personally clarify for the Committee the way in which agency staff were utilised by her service area and the circumstances under which

they would be employed. Following her briefing she responded to questions from members before leaving the meeting.

A2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

A3 Corporate Complaints, Compliments, Comments and Suggestions Performance Report – Quarter 4 (1 January to 31 March 2010)

The Committee noted a report from the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services providing details of complaints, compliments, comments and suggestions for quarter 4 (1 January to 31 March 2010)(for copy see file of Minutes).

The Customer Service Manager was in attendance to present the report. He advised that there had been an increase in complaints during the final quarter, particularly attributed to the number of complaints which had been made in Neighbourhood Services due to the inclement weather which had created problems with highways and refuse collections. Were that to be taken out of the equation, it was reported that the number of complaints were at a similar level to the previous quarter. The Customer Service Manager further advised that a document was being produced which would identify all learning outcomes which needed to be addressed. He advised that the document would be incorporated into the Corporate Improvement Programme and would be brought to the committee for information at a later date.

In response to member questions, the Customer Service Manager advised that the Audit Commission were conducting a mystery shopper initiative which would be addressing how easy it was to navigate around the Council's website. Learning outcomes would follow from that inspection.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A4 Request for Dispensation from Eldon Parish Council

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services regarding a request from Eldon Parish Council for a dispensation under the Standards Committee (Further Provisions)(England) Order 2009 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that three members of the Council were affiliated with the Eldon Community Partnership and as such left meetings inquorate when items on the Partnership were presented for consideration by the Parish Council. A dispensation was therefore requested which would allow those members to participate and vote on any future related items.

Resolved:

That a dispensation be granted to those members of Eldon Parish Council who are affiliated with the Eldon Community Partnership, permitting them to participate and vote on any future Parish Council business concerning the Eldon Community Partnership and that the dispensation shall continue until the next Parish Elections in 2013.

A5 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved

That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the said Act.

B6 Monitoring Officers Other Action – Complaint Reference: LA90

The Committee considered a report following allegations that a Parish Councillor had contravened the Code of Conduct. The Assessment Sub-Committee that had considered the complaint determined that it did not merit a formal investigation and therefore the Deputy Monitoring Officer wrote to the Parish Councillor to provide advice on future conduct (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

B7 Standards Committee Hearing – Complaint Reference: LA76

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which informed of the outcome of a Standards Committee Hearing into allegations of a breach of the Code of Conduct by a Town Councillor (for copy see file of Minutes). The Committee were advised that the Investigating Officer's finding of a breach of the Code of Conduct was upheld at a Standards Committee Hearing and the Panel imposed a sanction, that the Town Councillor was to provide a written apology to the complainant.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

B8 Standards Committee Hearing – Complaint Reference: LA35

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which informed of the outcome of a Standards Committee Hearing into allegations of a breach of the Code of Conduct by a Parish Councillor (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Committee were advised that the Investigating Officer's finding of a breach of the Code of Conduct was upheld at a Standards Committee Hearing and that the Panel had imposed a sanction, that the Parish Councillor was to provide a written apology to the complainant.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

B9 Update on the Handling of Current Complaints

The Committee considered an update report in respect of complaints of alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct (for copy see file of Minutes).

Members of the Committee requested that a more detailed report be provided to future meetings of the Committee, to which the Head of Legal and Democratic Services agreed.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

B10 Review of Completed Complaint Files

Members of the Committee inspected a sample of completed complaint files for the review period in question.

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Special Meeting of the Standards Committee held at the County Hall, Durham on **18 June 2010 at 11:00 a.m.**

PRESENT

Mrs D Winter in the Chair

Members of the Committee

Councillors J Armstrong, A Bainbridge, E Bell, C Carr, P Charlton, D Farry, J Shiell and D Southwell.

Mrs D Balmer and Mrs T Naples

Councillors T Batson, J Day, F Duggan, M Goyns and D Liversidge.

Other Members:

Mr J Hitchman

Councillors G Huntington and B Myers

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Jopling, W Stelling and M Williams; Mr B Argyle, Mr W Ault and Mr P Thompson.

A1 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

A2 Standards Committee Development Strategy

The Chair of the Committee advised that the purpose of the meeting was to work through the Development Strategy to identify any additional content which could be added and to make any improvements.

The Democratic Services Manager advised that although the document had been presented to the Committee before it had since been revised and was therefore being presented to the Committee in a near final stage. She continued that the document needed to be formally adopted by the Committee and that Key Performance Indicators would need to be identified so that the progress and implementation of the strategy could be monitored. The Committee therefore worked through the Development Strategy page by page and amendments, alterations and additional content were identified by members of the Committee. It was agreed that the Development Strategy would be altered accordingly further to the agreed suggestions which had been made.

In order to identify Key Performance Indicators to complement and support the establishing and progression of the Development Strategy, the Chair suggested that a small focus group of members from the Committee should be established for that purpose. In conjunction with the Chair it was agreed that Councillor E Bell, Councillor P Charlton and Mrs T Naples would constitute the KPI Focus Group and would meet within the coming month to discuss and identify Key Performance Indicators.

Resolved:

1. That the Development Strategy be modified accordingly to incorporate all agreed amendments;
2. That the KPI Focus Group of the Standards Committee meet to identify appropriate Performance Indicators, associated targets and monitoring mechanisms;
3. That the amended Development Strategy and a plan of the Key Performance Indicators for 2010/11 be presented to the next quarterly meeting of the Standards Committee.