

At a Meeting of the Standards Committee held at the County Hall, Durham on **Monday 8 August 2005** at **10.00 a.m.**

PRESENT:

Mr E Marchant in the Chair

Members of the Committee:

Councillors Maddison, Nugent, Southwell and Whitfield

Other Members:

Councillors Carr, Chaplow, Chapman, Coates, Fenwick, Foster, Gray, Iveson, Knox, Magee, Pye, Smith and Stadling.

A1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 May 2005 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

With reference to Minute A5 the Committee was advised that additional background in relation to staff conduct complaints was now being provided.

With reference to Minute A6, the Committee was advised that the Standards Committee's Annual Report had been presented to the County Council at its meeting on 3 August 2005. The Council had expressed its satisfaction with the Committees stewardship of the ethical standards agenda.

A2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received from members in relation to the business on the agenda.

A3 Standards Board Roadshow 2005

The Committee noted the Report of Delegates from the Standards Board Roadshow 2005 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Much of the business covered at the Roadshow had been included in the Committee's Annual Report.

A4 Complaints Handling

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Corporate Services) and Monitoring Officer which provided details of complaints handling in the Council during the period April to June 2005 (for report see file of Minutes).

In the first quarter of 2005/2006, 58 complaints had been received, which averaged 19 per month (compared with 31 per month in the period April to June 2004). There was a notable reduction in the number of Social Care and Health complaints from 74 in the first quarter of 2004/2005 to 41 in the first quarter of 2005/2006. The Deputy Chief Executive (Corporate Services) advised the Committee that current arrangements within Social Care and Health led to difficulties in presenting detailed information on complaints handling. In the circumstances, it was agreed that discussions on this would take place with the Director of Social Care and Health to investigate how more relevant information could be provided.

All complaints in this quarter had been acknowledged and received full responses or progress reports within the Council's performance targets. Approximately 90% of complainants (52) were either satisfied as to how their complaint had been handled or did not pursue their complaint further beyond Stage 1.

In this quarter, poor service was the largest single category of complaint at 38% compared to 43% in the same period in 2004. Staff conduct represented 28% of complaints received in the first quarter of this year compared with 30% in the comparison period.

As far as compliments were concerned, these had continued to far outnumber formal complaints and during the first quarter of 2005/2006 a total of 205 compliments were received, compared to 188 received in the first quarter of 2004/2005. Members requested that a breakdown of compliments by Service be provided to future Committee meetings.

The report also included additional information which individual Services had provided on the nature and outcome of complaints during the period in question.

The 2004/05 Annual Letter from the Local Government Ombudsman had now been received. The number of complaints had risen slightly, but this did not cause the Ombudsman concern. Similarly, no trends or particular subject matters gave any cause for concern. Once again, the Ombudsman had acknowledged the Council's willingness to settle complaints.

It was pleasing to note that in 2004/05 there had been no findings of maladministration against the Council.

As far as compensation payments recommended by the Ombudsman were concerned, it was agreed that in future details of these would be reported to the Committee.

It was also agreed that Services would be reminded of the importance of keeping Members apprised of progress with complaints raised on behalf of their constituents.

Resolved:

That the report be noted

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 item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the said Act

B6 Review of Completed Complaint Files

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